

# Integrating Ecotheology into English language teaching: A conceptual framework for ecological awareness

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the potential integration of ecotheology into English Language Teaching (ELT) as a value-based approach to sustainability education. While environmental themes have been introduced in ELT, the spiritual-ethical foundations of ecological responsibility remain largely unexplored. Using a narrative literature review and thematic synthesis, this study analyzes recent works on ecotheology, eco-pedagogy, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The review identifies key ecotheological principles—stewardship, sacredness of nature, justice, simplicity, and interconnectedness—and highlights their relevance to educational practices. Findings suggest that ELT offers flexible spaces for embedding ecological values through thematic content, reflective tasks, and project-based activities. The study proposes a Value-Based Ecotheological ELT Framework that integrates moral ecology with language learning. The framework contributes conceptually to sustainability-oriented ELT and opens avenues for future empirical research.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global ecological crisis such as climate change, land degradation, pollution, to biodiversity loss—is inextricably linked to humanity's perspective on nature. Many experts argue that this crisis is not merely a scientific or technical issue, but also a spiritual and moral one (White, 1967). All facets of society, including education, must take immediate action in response to the global environmental problem (Raphael and Nandan, ). This gave rise to the ecotheology approach, a study that examines the relationship between humans and nature through a theological and ethical perspective, emphasizing that nature is a trust, a creation that must be respected, and not simply an object of exploitation. In addition, it provides a perspective that views nature not merely as a physical entity but as sacred, interconnected, and entrusted to human stewardship (Nasr, 2020). While ecotheology is often discussed within religious or theological education, its core values are universal and can be incorporated into diverse learning contexts.

In parallel with these developments, contemporary education has increasingly emphasized environmental responsibility through the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). UNESCO promotes sustainability education that integrates ethical, moral, and value-based dimensions alongside scientific knowledge. Within language education, this orientation has encouraged the emergence of environmentally oriented pedagogies in English Language Teaching (ELT). Recent studies demonstrate that ecological themes can be effectively embedded in ELT to enhance learners' ecoliteracy, critical thinking, and sustainable behavior (Seli, et.al, 2025; Maghfiroh et al., 2025).

Moreover, scholars have increasingly called for environmentally based language teaching and green pedagogy as concrete responses to climate challenges in education (Nur, et al., 2022). Conceptual frameworks such as Eco-ELT position language classrooms as spaces for ecological inquiry, reflection, and praxis, highlighting the role of ELT in addressing environmental crises (Saiful, 2025). Empirical studies further

illustrate how eco-oriented ELT materials and learning models can promote sustainable thinking, motivation, and environmentally responsible behavior among EFL learners (Kalsum et al., 2024; Misbah, 2024). Notably, faith-based Green ELT curricula have also demonstrated positive impacts on students' environmental awareness and learning motivation, indicating the pedagogical potential of integrating ecological education with moral and spiritual values (Scipio et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of literature on Eco-ELT, green pedagogy, and sustainability-oriented language education, most existing studies primarily emphasize environmental themes and behavioral outcomes. The ethical and spiritual foundations underlying human–nature relationships remain largely implicit. Consequently, while environmental education in ELT has advanced significantly, the explicit integration of ecotheological perspectives—linking ecological responsibility with moral and spiritual values—remains underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present article proposes a conceptual framework for integrating ecotheology into English Language Teaching. By positioning ELT as both a linguistic and moral–ecological learning space, this study seeks to extend existing Eco-ELT and green pedagogy models through a value-based ecotheological lens. The proposed framework contributes to sustainability-oriented ELT by foregrounding stewardship, interconnectedness, and ethical responsibility, offering a theoretically grounded foundation for future empirical research and pedagogical innovation.

In recent years, education systems around the world have emphasized the need for developing environmental and moral responsibility among learners, an approach integrated within the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework. This framework encourages teachers to integrate environmental issues into all subjects, including language. However, literature on the intersection of ecotheology and English language teaching remains scarce. Yet both have strong potential to reinforce each other: ELT can be a vehicle for developing language competency while also internalizing ethical-ecological values. This article offers a conceptual framework for this integration.

## 2. METHOD

A narrative literature review was employed to explore theoretical, pedagogical, and empirical discussions on the integration of ecotheology into English Language Teaching (ELT). Relevant literature was selected based on its conceptual relevance to ecotheology, eco-pedagogy, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). A thematic synthesis approach was used to identify key concepts, patterns, and gaps, enabling the development of an integrative, value-based conceptual framework for ELT.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Ecotheology concept

Ecotheology is a theological approach that views the relationship between humans and nature as a moral and spiritual one (Moltmann, 1993). In addition, ecotheology, according to Hitzhusen (2013), contends that environmental deterioration is a reflection of a spiritual crisis that stems from a detachment from moral and religious principles that have historically encouraged harmony with the environment. It has several principles. They are stewardship (humans as caretakers of the earth, not rulers), sacredness of nature (nature as a creation with intrinsic value), justice and balance (ecological balance as a moral mandate), simplicity and anti-consumerism (living simply to reduce environmental damage), interconnectedness, and humans, nature, and God are interconnected in the system of life. Referring to those principles, humans are stewards tasked with ecological stewardship, not conquerors of the natural world.

Across the reviewed studies, several recurring principles of ecotheology were identified: stewardship, the sacredness of nature, justice and balance, simplicity and anti-consumerism, and interconnectedness among humans, nature, and the divine. These principles consistently portray nature not merely as a resource for exploitation, but as a creation with intrinsic value and moral significance. This worldview provides a normative foundation for sustainability efforts by framing ecological responsibility as an ethical obligation rather than a purely technical or scientific concern.

Ecotheology has evolved beyond theological studies, as evidenced by recent advances. In order to promote environmental stewardship, ecotheology offers a values-driven approach that integrates spirituality, ethics, and ecology into a cohesive worldview. From a philosophical perspective, ecotheology offers two main ideas: the intrinsic value of nature, which is based on spiritual traditions; and the moral duty to practice ecological stewardship, which presents sustainability as a religious commitment. These ideas provide the intellectual underpinnings for incorporating ecological consciousness into language instruction and other educational contexts.

### Ecotheology in education

The global movement for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is in line with the incorporation of ecotheology into education. UNESCO (2020) encourages learning on sustainability that is grounded in ethics and values in addition to science. This approach is supported by ecotheology, which helps students make the connection between spirituality and ecological responsibility. In school context, ecotheological approaches have been incorporated into curriculum design, which emphasizes moral ecology; character education, which emphasizes stewardship ideals; and environmental education, which connects religious teachings to ecological actions.

Pedagogically, ecotheology enhances transformative and comprehensive learning approaches. It invites students to consider their identities, behaviors, and obligations to the environment (Syafaruddin, 2025). This establishes a learning environment that is focused on developing values and changing behavior in addition to acquiring new information. However, research also highlights limitations: interdisciplinary alignment is still difficult; educational institutions seldom openly integrate theological–ecological themes; and teachers frequently lack confidence when articulating the spiritual underpinnings of environmental ethics. These gaps make it possible to include ecotheology into non-traditional fields like language instruction.

### **Ecotheology in ELT**

English language teaching is not viewed as skills-oriented, however ELT has evolved towards value-based or culturally grounded ELT. Widodo, et.al., (2018) argued that cultural and moral values can be integrated into ELT materials systematically. Based on the concept of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), language learning can integrate non-linguistic themes (e.g., the environment or moral values) as content learned through language. The Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach in ELT also allows students to produce meaningful products (posters, videos, environmental campaigns) that can be linked to ecotheology.

The integration of ecotheology into ELT is theoretically feasible for several reasons. First, ELT is an adaptable medium for thematic learning. Themes like environmental stewardship, the sanctity of nature, or ecological ethics can be organically introduced through reading texts, dialogues, articles, and discussions. Second, critical and reflective thinking are encouraged by ELT. Journaling, debating, and narrative writing are examples of activities that support ecotheological objectives because they encourage students to consider values and viewpoints. Third, ELT promotes global citizenship. By encouraging moral responsibility and environmental consciousness, ecotheology enhances the ethical aspect of global citizenship. Fourth, learning a language enhances messages about the environment. Texts that incorporate ecotheological concepts can improve discourse skills, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and ecological conscience all at the same time.

Despite these possibilities, there is still a dearth of ecotheological study in ELT. Environmental issues, rather than ecotheological or spiritual-ecological values, are the main emphasis of ELT sustainability studies. The development of an ecotheology-based ELT framework is innovative, as this gap demonstrates. Based on these gaps, this study proposes a Value-Based Ecotheological ELT Framework consisting of four interconnected components:

a. Theological–Ecological Foundations

Drawing from ecotheology, students learn ecological stewardship through moral and spiritual perspectives, adapted to local cultural values.

b. Language–Content Integration

ELT activities integrate thematic texts on nature, stewardship, eco-spiritual narratives, and values-based ecological dilemmas.

c. Reflective Ecological Literacy

Students demonstrate ecological awareness through reflection tasks, journaling, critical reading, and discussion of moral issues.

d. Action-Oriented Linguistic Practices

Students apply ecotheological insights through projects (e.g., “sacred trees” storytelling, value-based environmental campaigns, eco-reflection videos).

This framework positions ELT as not only a linguistic domain but also a transformative moral–ecological learning space, supporting both language development and value-based ecological consciousness.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study shows how ecotheology offers a valuable framework based on values for incorporating ecological concern into English language teaching (ELT). The body of research shows that moral and spiritual aspects are intimately related to ecological issues, making ecotheology a pertinent basis for education focused on sustainability. This review argues that ELT has strong pedagogical potential to embed ecotheological values through content-based instruction, reflective language activities, and project-based learning. To address the identified gap, this study proposes a Value-Based Ecotheological ELT Framework that conceptualizes language learning as both a linguistic and moral–ecological endeavor. This framework contributes theoretically to sustainability-oriented ELT and provides a foundation for future empirical research. However, this study is

limited by its reliance on narrative literature synthesis rather than empirical classroom implementation. Future research is therefore recommended to empirically examine the applicability, effectiveness, and contextual adaptability of ecotheology-based ELT practices across diverse educational settings. Such studies would strengthen the theoretical propositions advanced in this article and further establish ecotheology as a meaningful framework for value-based language education.

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