

Language, land, and learning: Teaching through an ecopedagogical lens in rural Aceh classrooms

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Abstrak

Penelitian studi kasus kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi integrasi prinsip ekopedagogi dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di pedesaan Aceh, Indonesia. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pengalaman guru dan siswa dalam mengaitkan tema lingkungan serta budaya lokal dengan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, persepsi mereka terhadap praktik tersebut, dan tantangan yang muncul dalam pelaksanaannya. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan delapan guru dari SMP Negeri 1 Peukan Bada, SMP Negeri 1 Lhong Raya, SMP Negeri 1 Kuta Cot Glie, dan SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, Pidie, masing-masing dua guru dari setiap sekolah. Data juga diperkuat melalui analisis dokumen sebagai bentuk triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki antusiasme untuk menghubungkan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dengan realitas lokal siswa. Namun, integrasi ekopedagogi masih bersifat permukaan, terutama terbatas pada penulisan deskriptif dan pengenalan kosakata tentang lingkungan, desa, atau kehidupan sehari-hari. Pembahasan yang lebih kritis, seperti diskusi masalah ekologis dan pemecahan masalah lingkungan, masih jarang dilakukan. Hambatan utama meliputi kurangnya bahan ajar kontekstual, keterbatasan waktu, dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri guru dalam membahas topik kompleks menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Meskipun demikian, guru menilai pendekatan ini mampu meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan menumbuhkan kebanggaan terhadap lingkungan lokal. Studi ini menegaskan perlunya dukungan sistemik berupa pengembangan bahan ajar lokal dan pelatihan guru agar integrasi bahasa, lingkungan, dan pembelajaran dapat berlangsung lebih bermakna.

Kata kunci: Pasca-konflik; Aceh; ekopedagogi; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris; lingkungan; pendidikan pedesaan

Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the integration of ecopedagogical principles in English language teaching in rural Aceh, Indonesia. Focusing on both teachers' and students' experiences, the research investigates how environmental and local cultural themes are woven into English lessons, the perceptions of these practices, and the challenges encountered in their implementation. Data were collected

through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with 8 teachers SMP Negeri 1 Peukan Bada, SMP Negeri 1 Lhong Raya, SMP Negeri 1 Kuta Cot Glie, and SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, Pidie, (2 teachers from each school) with findings triangulated by document analysis. Results show that while teachers express enthusiasm for connecting English learning to local realities, such integration remains mostly superficial—limited to descriptive writing or vocabulary related to the environment or village life. Deeper engagement, such as critical discussion or problem-solving about ecological issues, is rare due to a lack of contextually relevant materials, time constraints, and limited teacher confidence in discussing complex topics in English. Teachers perceive the approach as beneficial for student engagement and local pride, but structural limitations, such as curriculum demands and textbook content, hinder sustained implementation. The study highlights the need for systemic support, including the development of locally relevant teaching resources and ongoing professional development. By documenting these complex classroom realities, the research addresses a gap in the literature on ecopedagogical English teaching in underexplored rural Indonesian contexts and calls for coordinated educational reforms to foster meaningful integration of language, land, and learning.

Keywords: *Post-conflict; ecopedagogy; English teaching; environment; rural education*

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, the intertwined crises of environmental degradation and climate change have prompted an urgent call for educational systems to play a transformative role in shaping environmentally responsible citizens. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has consistently highlighted the role of education in fostering environmental stewardship through its Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework, which emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and values-based learning to address ecological challenges (Zein & Hamied, 2025). Within this global movement, the concept of ecopedagogy has emerged as a pedagogical response rooted in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Contreras-Ameduri, 2025), urging educators to move beyond merely transmitting environmental facts toward cultivating critical consciousness about the relationship between humans and the planet (Peters & Green, 2021).

Ecopedagogy positions education as an agent of socio-environmental transformation by integrating ecological knowledge with ethical reflection, cultural heritage, and civic action. It emphasizes that learners should not only understand environmental issues but also critically question their socio-political roots and take meaningful action (Lorenz et al., 2021). However, despite increasing recognition of its importance, the integration of ecopedagogical principles into mainstream education—particularly in language education—remains underdeveloped. Most school curricula, especially in developing contexts, are still shaped by standardized assessments and textbook-driven teaching (Moriarty, 2025), which often leave little room for contextually relevant and critical engagement with environmental issues (Escaño & Mañero, 2022).

Within this broader conversation on ecopedagogy, there is a specific intersection that warrants closer examination: the integration of ecopedagogical principles into English language teaching (ELT). English, as a global lingua franca, is not merely a vehicle for communication but also a gateway to cross-cultural understanding and international discourse (Girak et al., 2019). Embedding environmental and local cultural themes into ELT can therefore serve dual

purposes—enhancing language proficiency while simultaneously fostering ecological awareness and strengthening local identity (Gani et al., 2023).

In rural Indonesia, particularly in provinces such as Aceh, English is taught as a compulsory subject in junior high schools (Silvhiany et al., 2023). While the national curriculum provides room for thematic teaching, the extent to which environmental and cultural content is meaningfully integrated into English lessons remains unclear. Aceh presents a unique case: it is a region rich in biodiversity and traditional ecological knowledge, yet its rural schools often face resource limitations, rigid curricular structures, and linguistic challenges that can hinder innovative teaching approaches (Girak et al., 2019; Hung, 2014). This makes Aceh an ideal site for exploring how ecopedagogical principles can be incorporated into ELT in contexts that are both linguistically and environmentally distinctive.

Despite the global push for ESD and the theoretical compatibility of ecopedagogy with communicative and contextualized language learning, a persistent disconnect remains between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities. In many rural Indonesian classrooms, environmental and cultural themes are introduced superficially—often limited to vocabulary lists or simple descriptive tasks about nature and village life (Hargreaves et al., 2023; Tuparevska, 2023). Such activities, while relevant, rarely progress into deeper critical engagement with environmental issues, such as analyzing the causes of deforestation, debating solutions to waste management problems, or reflecting on local practices of resource use.

Several factors contribute to this gap. Teachers may lack the confidence or language proficiency needed to facilitate complex discussions in English (Santos et al., 2021). They may also be constrained by time, as curriculum pacing guides and exam preparation often leave little room for thematic exploration. Furthermore, textbooks and teaching materials rarely feature local environmental and cultural contexts, making it difficult for teachers to design ecopedagogical lessons without significant additional preparation (Ratriyana, 2023). Consequently, the potential for ELT to contribute to both language learning and environmental consciousness remains underrealized (Misiaszek, 2022).

This study aims to explore how ecopedagogical principles are integrated into English language teaching in rural junior high schools in Aceh, Indonesia, by focusing on teachers' and students' experiences. Specifically, it examines (1) the ways environmental and local cultural themes are incorporated into English lessons, (2) teachers' and students' perceptions of these practices, and (3) the challenges that arise in implementing ecopedagogical approaches in the classroom. The significance of this study is twofold. Pedagogically, it contributes to ongoing discussions about how ELT can function not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a platform for critical engagement with local and global issues. By documenting the realities of ecopedagogical integration in rural Aceh, the study offers practical insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to create more contextually relevant and socially responsive English lessons.

Several studies have explored the intersections between environmental education and language teaching, albeit in varying contexts and with differing emphases. First, Mearns & Platteel (2021) introduced the idea of global education in language teaching, advocating for the inclusion of environmental, peace, and human rights topics in ESL/EFL curricula. While pioneering, this early work focused largely on raising awareness rather than embedding critical, action-oriented pedagogy. Second, Kazazoglu (2025) examined environmental themes in ELT integration and found that although teachers valued contextualizing lessons with local environmental issues, they faced a lack of relevant teaching materials and professional training—issues that parallel the Indonesian context. Third, Saifulloh et al. (2025) investigated ESD integration in Indonesian English classrooms, concluding that integration often occurred at a

surface level, such as using environmental topics for reading comprehension passages, without fostering deeper critical thinking or problem-solving skills. Finally, Silvhiyany et al. (2023) explored culturally responsive ELT in rural Java, demonstrating that weaving local cultural elements into English lessons enhanced student engagement while also highlighting the difficulty of aligning such approaches with standardized assessments.

While these studies offer valuable insights, several gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research specifically focused on the application of ecopedagogy in rural EFL contexts in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh. Second, most previous studies emphasize either environmental themes or cultural themes, but rarely examine how both can be integrated simultaneously to reflect the lived realities of rural communities. Third, the majority of existing research stops at describing teacher perceptions or general practices without delving deeply into the structural and pedagogical constraints that shape the actual classroom integration of ecopedagogy.

The novelty of this study lies in its combined focus on environmental and local cultural integration in ELT within a rural Acehese context, using ecopedagogy as a theoretical lens. By triangulating data from classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and document analysis, the research moves beyond self-reported practices to capture the complex interplay between teacher agency, curricular constraints, and local realities. Additionally, the study situates ecopedagogy not merely as an environmental add-on to language lessons but as a critical and culturally grounded approach to English teaching.

To guide this investigation, the study poses the following research question: How are ecopedagogical principles integrated into English language teaching in rural junior high schools in Aceh, and what are the perceptions, practices, and challenges associated with this integration?

METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore how ecopedagogical principles are integrated into English language teaching in rural junior high schools in Aceh. A qualitative case study was chosen because the research aimed to understand teaching practices, perceptions, and challenges in depth, focusing on real classroom situations rather than testing variables. This approach also allowed for a detailed examination of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape teachers' practices.

The participants were eight English teachers from four rural junior high schools: SMP Negeri 1 Peukan Bada, SMP Negeri 1 Lhong Raya, SMP Negeri 1 Kuta Cot Glie, and SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga in Pidie District. Two teachers from each school were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included teaching Grades 7–9, having at least two years of teaching experience, and showing interest in or prior attempts to include environmental or cultural content in English lessons. These teachers were considered suitable because they had direct experience in designing and delivering lessons and could reflect on both the successes and difficulties of integrating ecopedagogical themes.

Although the main respondents were teachers, students naturally participated during classroom observations. No formal student interviews were conducted, but their interactions and responses during lessons were included in the field notes. The four schools were chosen to represent different rural settings, each with varying access to resources and proximity to natural environments such as forests, rivers, and farmland.

Regarding the instruments, two instruments were used to collect data. First, classroom observations were carried out using a structured protocol. The protocol recorded the focus of the lesson, types of tasks, targeted language skills, and any environmental or cultural themes. It also noted interaction patterns and assessment activities, with selected teacher and student exchanges

written down verbatim. Second, semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted after the observations. These interviews explored teachers' beliefs about teaching, their strategies for linking English to local and environmental topics, the benefits and challenges they experienced, and the kinds of resources they used or needed. The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or Acehese, and were audio-recorded with consent.

Data collection took place in several steps. First, permission was obtained from the district education office and the principals of the four schools. Teachers were informed about the study, given consent forms, and assured of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and schools in reporting the findings. Second, schedules were arranged so that each teacher could be observed during at least one lesson in which environmental or cultural topics were relevant. In some cases, a second observation was possible, allowing comparison across different skills, such as speaking and writing. Third, classroom observations were carried out, lasting 80–90 minutes each. The researcher sat at the back of the class to avoid disrupting the lessons, while taking detailed notes on lesson flow, activities, and interactions. Instances of ecopedagogical integration, such as linking vocabulary to local plants or discussing village environmental issues, were recorded. Finally, interviews with each teacher were held within one week after the observation. This timing allowed teachers to reflect on the lesson while it was still fresh in their memory. They were also encouraged to explain why they chose particular topics or tasks and to share related lesson plans or materials.

For data analysis, we combined a deductive framework based on ecopedagogical theory with an inductive search for themes emerging from the data. All observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents were read several times to gain familiarity with the data. Codes were first developed from the literature, such as “local context,” “critical inquiry,” “problem-solving,” and “community connection,” and were then refined as new ideas emerged from the data. Coding was applied across all datasets to identify patterns in how environmental and cultural content was introduced, what kinds of tasks were used, and what language skills were targeted. Comparisons were made between teachers and schools to examine whether practices were consistent or varied. Matrices were used to align observed activities with teachers' stated intentions and with the content of their teaching materials.

Data from observations and interviews were then triangulated to confirm or contrast findings from different sources. For example, if a teacher described encouraging critical discussion in class, this claim was checked against observation notes and lesson materials. This process helped ensure that the conclusions were supported by multiple forms of evidence. To strengthen the data credibility, short summaries of each teacher's case were shared with the teachers so they could clarify or correct factual details. Peer discussion with another qualitative researcher also helped refine the coding and interpretation. Throughout the process, a reflexive journal was kept to record decisions, impressions, and possible researcher biases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the results and discussion in relation to the research questions stated earlier. It outlines the key findings obtained from the data and interprets them in light of the study's focus, relevant theoretical perspectives, and the context of ecopedagogical English language teaching in rural Aceh.

Result

The results from classroom observations and teacher interviews present a clear but complex picture of how ecopedagogical principles are finding their way into English language teaching in rural Aceh. Across the four junior high schools involved in this study, teachers demonstrated a

willingness to link lessons to local realities, often drawing on students' everyday surroundings, traditions, and environmental contexts. However, these connections rarely moved beyond the surface level. The observations confirmed much of what teachers described in interviews: that integration is constrained by structural pressures, resource limitations, and concerns about language proficiency, yet still valued for its potential to improve student engagement and foster a sense of cultural pride. In most observed lessons, environmental and cultural references appeared in some form, even if only briefly. Teachers tended to insert familiar examples into existing textbook activities, such as replacing "New York" with "Banda Aceh" or swapping a generic "tropical forest" with "Ulu Masen." In one Grade 8 speaking activity at SMP Negeri 1 Peukan Bada, for example, students worked in pairs to describe plants and flowers in the school garden. The task required them to produce simple descriptive sentences, and they were noticeably more engaged when referring to plants they saw daily. This kind of adaptation mirrored what many teachers said in interviews, including T3, who explained, "When I use examples from the rice fields or the beach, students immediately pay attention because they know these places well."

Similar strategies were observed in reading lessons. At SMP Negeri 1 Lhong Raya, a teacher adapted a textbook passage on "My Hometown" by inserting local landmarks such as the traditional market, the river used for fishing, and a rice field on the edge of the village. Students responded with nods and small smiles, signaling recognition of these places. T7's comment during interviews reinforced this practice: "It's not only about learning English; it's about showing them that their village is important and worth talking about in another language." Yet, while these familiar examples clearly enhanced interest, they often stopped short of deeper engagement. Rarely did a lesson use such topics as a springboard for critical discussion or problem-solving around environmental issues. At SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, a Grade 9 writing activity asked students to write short paragraphs about their favorite place in the village. The teacher monitored their work, focusing on grammar and vocabulary, but did not prompt discussion about environmental conditions or cultural heritage related to those places. T5's reflection echoed this limitation: "I can ask students to describe the river, but discussing why the river is polluted or how to solve it in English is much harder."

The absence of critical engagement was not due to a lack of awareness. Teachers were candid about the barriers they faced. Time pressure from the national curriculum, heavy reliance on standard textbooks, and lack of suitable materials were recurring themes in interviews. T2 explained, "The curriculum is full already. If I spend too much time on one topic, I will not finish the syllabus before the exam." Several teachers also pointed out that most environmental stories or resources they could find were written at a language level too advanced for their students, forcing them to simplify heavily or avoid them altogether. T6 noted, "There are many environmental stories, but most are too difficult for my students' English level, so I have to simplify a lot."

Language proficiency was another constraint, not only for students but for teachers themselves. In both observation and interview accounts, there were moments where potentially rich discussions were cut short because technical vocabulary was unfamiliar. In a Grade 8 lesson at SMP Negeri 1 Kuta Cot Glie, for example, a reading passage on clean rivers sparked a lively discussion—in Bahasa Indonesia—about waste in the local waterway. Students were animated, sharing personal experiences, but the teacher did not shift the conversation back into English. T4 admitted, "When students ask about climate change or deforestation, sometimes I know in Indonesian, but I don't know the exact English words." The observations also showed that classroom interaction patterns were mostly teacher-led. Teachers initiated questions, and students answered briefly, often in one or two words. Group work or project-based learning was rare, and when it occurred, it tended to focus on producing tangible outputs rather than sustained inquiry. One exception was seen at SMP Negeri 2 Muara Tiga, where a teacher organized a poster-making

activity on environmental campaigns. Students worked in groups to create slogans such as “Keep Our Beach Clean” and “Plant More Trees.” This was one of the few instances where learners collaborated more actively, using English creatively. However, even here the activity appeared as an isolated event rather than part of a longer thematic unit.

To provide a clearer overview of the findings, Figure X presents the observed patterns of ecopedagogical integration across the participating schools. The chart compares classroom practices, teachers’ reported intentions, common lesson activity types, and the main barriers affecting implementation.

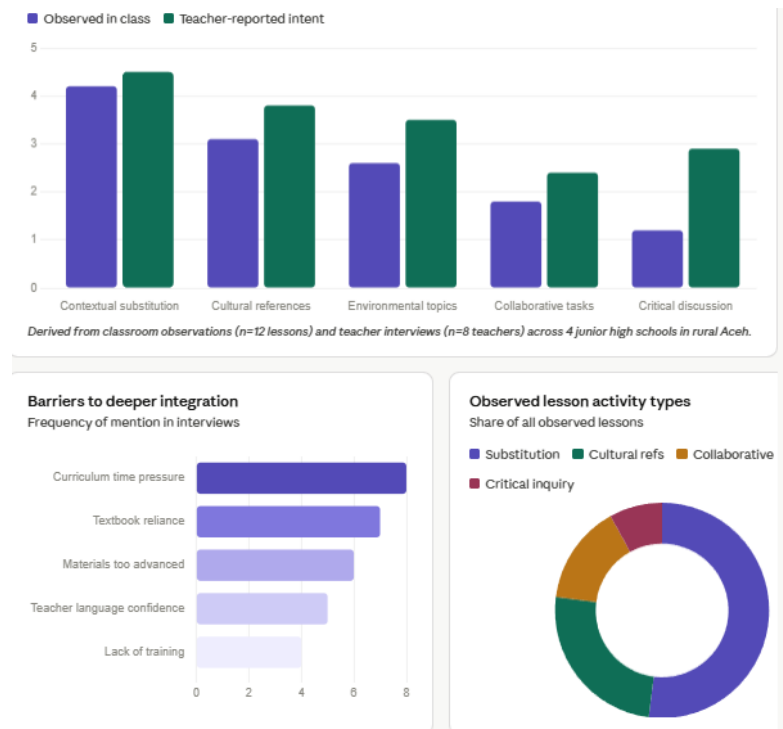


Figure 1. Patterns of Ecopedagogical Integration Across the Participating Schools

Figure 1 illustrates the extent to which ecopedagogical elements were observed in classroom practices and reflected in teachers’ stated intentions across the four participating schools. The findings indicate that contextual substitution and the inclusion of cultural references appeared more frequently than collaborative or critical inquiry-based activities. Teachers commonly connected lesson content to familiar local contexts, such as village life, local traditions, or environmental surroundings, in order to make English learning more relatable to students. However, activities involving deeper critical discussion or collaborative environmental problem-solving were less consistently implemented in classroom practice, despite being acknowledged by teachers during interviews. The figure also highlights several barriers that limited deeper integration, including curriculum time pressure, dependence on textbooks, limited teacher confidence in facilitating complex discussions in English, and insufficient training.

Despite these facts, teachers believed in the value of integrating environmental and cultural themes. They spoke about how such content improved student motivation, helped them remember vocabulary, and made lessons feel relevant. T8 remarked, “Students remember the words better if they are about something they see every day, like the paddy field or the fishing boats.” Similarly, T3 noted that when students presented about traditional food or local beaches, “they feel proud. It’s not only about grammar, it’s about telling their own story.” Observations supported these

claims: students were visibly more willing to speak when the topic connected directly to their lives.

At the same time, the observational data revealed missed opportunities. Lessons that touched on environmental or cultural topics did not usually develop them into sustained learning experiences. There was little evidence of activities that encouraged students to compare past and present environmental conditions, discuss causes and effects, or propose solutions. Instead, most integration served as a means of making examples relatable within otherwise conventional language exercises. This aligns with T1's self-assessment: "I usually change the examples in the book, like from 'New York' to 'Banda Aceh,' or from 'forest in America' to 'Ulu Masen.' But the activity is still the same as in the book." These patterns suggest that teachers' current strategies fall into what could be called "contextual substitution" rather than "pedagogical transformation." Contextual substitution makes lessons more engaging and relevant by swapping out unfamiliar examples for local ones, but pedagogical transformation would require reshaping lesson goals and activities to foreground environmental and cultural inquiry alongside language learning. Achieving the latter would demand more flexible curriculum structures, relevant and level-appropriate materials, and greater teacher confidence in using English to discuss complex topics. The connection between observed practices and teacher perspectives is strong. Teachers' stated challenges—curriculum demands, material scarcity, language confidence—were visible in the classroom. Likewise, their stated benefits—greater student interest, better vocabulary retention, and enhanced cultural pride—were also apparent in moments of lively discussion or increased participation. The findings therefore suggest that the gap between potential and practice is not rooted in unwillingness but in structural and resource-related constraints.

At a broader level, these findings highlight a tension between two realities. On one hand, rural Aceh's environmental and cultural richness offers abundant opportunities for meaningful ecopedagogical integration in English lessons. On the other hand, the institutional frameworks governing classroom practice—curriculum pacing, exam preparation, and textbook reliance—limit how far teachers can pursue those opportunities. Without systemic adjustments, integration will likely remain episodic and superficial. Shortly, the combined evidence from interviews and observations paints a picture of teachers who are eager to make English learning relevant to their students' lives and surroundings, but who often operate within conditions that favor minimal adaptations over substantial redesign. While small adaptations already yield visible benefits in engagement and motivation, the potential for deeper, transformative integration remains largely untapped. Addressing this gap will require coordinated efforts at the level of policy, teacher training, and resource development, ensuring that the link between language, land, and learning is not only recognized in theory but sustained in everyday classroom practice.

Discussion

Having presented the key findings, the following discussion interprets these results in relation to the study objectives and relevant previous research. It is learned that environmental and cultural topics appeared in nearly all observed lessons, usually through the substitution of local examples into textbook-based activities or through brief descriptive tasks. Teachers were enthusiastic about using familiar contexts because they believed these improved student engagement, vocabulary retention, and cultural pride. However, the integration remained largely superficial and rarely developed into critical inquiry, problem-solving, or project-based learning. Teachers cited time constraints imposed by the national curriculum, the lack of locally relevant English teaching materials, and limited confidence in discussing complex issues in English as major obstacles.

Although occasional creative activities, such as poster-making projects, demonstrated the potential for richer integration, these activities tended to appear as isolated events rather than as consistent pedagogical practices (Gede, 2021). These findings resonate with previous studies that

identified similar patterns. Thompson and McKinley (2018), for example, found that environmental topics in EFL classrooms are often used only for surface-level vocabulary or reading activities rather than for deeper ecopedagogical engagement. Similarly, Hasrina et al. (2024) argued that integrating global issues into language teaching requires more than merely selecting environmental topics; it also demands shifts in pedagogy and curriculum priorities.

In addition, Akbana and Yavuz (2022) suggested that project-based approaches to local ecological issues can strengthen both language development and environmental awareness, although they also emphasized the importance of institutional support. In the present study, the challenges reported by teachers—including curricular rigidity, material scarcity, and confidence gaps—closely mirrored those concerns. One possible explanation for the predominance of surface-level integration is that teachers operate within an exam-driven curriculum that prioritizes coverage of prescribed content. Such conditions leave little room for extended thematic units or open-ended exploration of environmental issues (Lorenz et al., 2021). The heavy reliance on textbooks also strongly shapes lesson design. When textbooks lack locally relevant environmental topics, teachers may adapt only examples rather than redesigning activities more fundamentally.

Furthermore, in rural contexts where opportunities for professional development are limited, teachers may not receive specific training on ecopedagogy or on using English to discuss scientific and environmental topics, as noted by Astawa et al. (2017). This may explain why even teachers who value environmental and cultural integration often avoid exploring such issues in greater depth. At the same time, the findings reveal meaningful points of divergence from earlier research. While McIntosh & Feltrin (2024), in their study conducted in rural Java, reported that integrating local culture into ELT sometimes faced resistance due to perceptions of irrelevance, the teachers in this Acehnese context were overwhelmingly positive about its relevance and value. This suggests that in certain rural communities, strong local identity and close environmental connections may motivate teachers to attempt integration, even if only at a basic level. The difference between aspiration and practice observed in this study is particularly revealing. Teachers were not indifferent to ecopedagogical ideas; rather, they were constrained by systemic conditions. Their willingness to adapt local examples, even within limited circumstances, demonstrates potential for further development if adequate support is provided. This finding aligns with Beer et al. (2024) and Misiaszek (2020), who argued that the success of ecopedagogy in language teaching depends not only on teachers' beliefs but also on structural enablers such as resources, time allocation, and institutional encouragement.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine how ecopedagogical principles are integrated into English language teaching in rural junior high schools in Aceh, focusing on both classroom practices and teachers' perspectives. The findings show, first, that environmental and cultural themes appeared in almost all observed lessons, usually through the adaptation of textbook content using local examples. Second, teachers valued these themes for improving student engagement, vocabulary retention, and cultural pride. Third, the integration was mostly superficial, rarely extending into critical inquiry, problem-solving, or sustained projects. Fourth, the major constraints included a rigid curriculum, a lack of locally relevant materials, and limited confidence in discussing complex topics in English. While occasional creative activities showed potential, they remained isolated events.

The implication of these findings is that rural English classrooms in Aceh already have a strong foundation of teacher motivation and student interest for ecopedagogical integration. However, without structural support, this approach will remain limited. Greater curriculum flexibility, locally relevant resource development, and targeted teacher training can help transform

small adaptations into meaningful and sustained pedagogical practice. This study helps address the earlier research gap by providing empirical evidence from a rural Indonesian context. It shows how environmental and cultural integration in ELT is practiced under resource and policy constraints, an area that remains underexplored. However, the study is limited by its focus on only four schools and by the absence of systematic student interviews, which could have enriched the understanding of learner perspectives. Future research should investigate student perceptions directly, explore the long-term impact of ecopedagogical projects in rural EFL settings, and examine how curriculum policy changes might enable deeper integration. Comparative studies across rural and urban schools could also reveal how context shapes opportunities for linking language, environment, and local culture.

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