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THE ROLE OF ELT IN PROMOTING ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Living in a natural setting allows societies to share knowledge and stories that convey values beyond the conscious awareness or deliberate appreciation of individuals [1]. Similarly, the language of stories plays a central role in shaping critical thinking within diverse social contexts. This study investigates the teaching culture that incorporates ecological perspectives and the need to promote such values within the English department at Kokand University. Focusing on ecological consciousness in education, this study emphasizes the importance of teachers' awareness of stories as mental models and their connection to language in addressing ecological challenges in undergraduate classrooms. Using Stibbe's theoretical framework on mental models, the research explores how cultural and educational settings influence perceptions of ecosystems and highlight the language of stories rooted in community and social contexts. The study captures the perceptions of English department teachers at Kokand University through surveys and qualitative analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand teachers' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about integrating ecological awareness into their teaching practices. The research aims to examine how these practices foster knowledge about the local environment and ecological sustainability in diverse language learning classrooms.

The study concludes that the teaching culture at Kokand University reflects both opportunities and

challenges in promoting ecological awareness. Teachers increasingly emphasize the relationship between communication, human interactions, and the environment. This focus is particularly important in helping undergraduate students develop mental models that prioritize ecological sustainability. Such efforts aim to create new, meaningful narratives that align with the demands of 21st-century education and address pressing environmental concerns.

INTRODUCTION. Modern societies are increasingly driven by rapid social changes, yet they struggle to transition into sustainable systems that ensure the survival of future generations amidst the collapse of current civilizations [2]. In this context, language emerges as a powerful tool that not only reflects cultural practices but also influences them. According to Stibbe, the language of stories plays a crucial role in shaping cultural teaching practices, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing harmony between humans and their environment.

Language does not exist in isolation; it interacts dynamically with its environment. Understanding this interaction is key to addressing environmental challenges in education. Haugen emphasized the ecological perspective of language, noting that language connects individuals to their social and physical surroundings, serving as a medium for interpreting and interacting with the world. Language ecology further explores how linguistic elements, including the language of stories, are deeply rooted in their surroundings and the cultural narratives that sustain them.

In higher education, there is a growing demand for teaching practices that go beyond traditional academic approaches to incorporate sustainable, inclusive, and flexible methodologies [3]. This necessitates a focus on the perceptions of educators and their role in addressing environmental challenges. Teachers, as key facilitators of knowledge, must acquire competencies that enable them to use language effectively in constructing mental models that promote sustainability and harmony between human and physical environments.

Teaching practices are compressed by language's ability to address environmental challenges in insightful and relatable ways. Language ecology highlights how the stories we live by interact with the natural world, shaping our understanding of the ecosystem and guiding us toward sustainable development. Given the growing threats to ecosystems and

the risk of language extinction, adopting an ecological perspective in teaching is not just beneficial but essential.

This study focuses on the teaching culture within the English Department at Kokand University. It aims to explore how ecological consciousness can be integrated into teaching practices to foster sustainable thinking among undergraduate students. By examining the role of language in addressing environmental challenges, the research highlights the importance of narratives in shaping mental models that align with 21st-century educational goals.

The study emphasizes the need for a teaching culture that aligns with professional development initiatives to enhance eco-friendly environments in educational settings. By reframing mental models and fostering an understanding of the relationship between language and the physical environment, the study seeks to contribute to a sustainable teaching culture that promotes harmony between humans and nature.

Literature Review Sustainable development is widely regarded as a morally sound response to global trends in which research increasingly serves commercial and private interests, influencing the characteristics and values of youth pursuing higher education. As globalization and complexity in higher education institutions continue to grow, there is a pressing need to adopt future-oriented perspectives that integrate teaching cultures fostering harmony between humans and the environment. The ecological crisis significantly impacts language teachers' awareness and their ability to address ecological perspectives in classrooms. This, in turn, shapes the attitudes, ideologies, stories, and behaviors of language learners [4].

Eco-Pedagogy and Ecolinguistics in Education

Eco-pedagogical and ecolinguistic approaches in education have gained increasing attention. A study examining secondary-level English language textbooks highlighted a lack of environmental content, which is insufficient for improving students' language proficiency while fostering an understanding of ecological issues. This gap underscores the need for greater emphasis on ecological consciousness in teaching materials.

Language is more than a communication tool; it shapes cultural identities within social groups. Language instruction not only promotes cultural development but also creates socio-emotional environments where learners can express their perspectives and engage critically. This aligns with the recommendation that EFL textbooks should move beyond language skill development to fostering critical thinking abilities, which are essential for ecological sustainability.

Language, Culture, and Ecological Awareness

The stories we live by are shaped through language. These stories serve as reservoirs that influence individual perceptions and social practices. This expands on this idea, emphasizing the need for awareness of how language and culture shape social, economic, cultural, and religious systems. These systems impact the broader ecosystems that sustain life.

As argued that eco-critical language awareness in English Language Teaching (ELT) can promote justice, wellbeing, and sustainability. They highlighted that traditional language learning methods often contribute to ecological degradation, whereas incorporating ecological perspectives can counter this trend. Similarly, this concluded that language learning offers a powerful means to foster sustainable communication approaches, promoting long-term ecological awareness.

Challenges in Ecolinguistics

Higher-level environmental issues related to exploitative language patterns are deeply connected to how speakers use language [5]. Haugen emphasized the influence of language on vocabulary, content, grammatical structures, and subject matters in social contexts. Ecolinguistic studies have explored these challenges, highlighting how modern linguistics often neglects the ecological domain. These studies stress the importance of integrating ecological perspectives into language teaching practices.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach within an interpretative paradigm, emphasizing the exploration of individual perceptions and experiences in teaching practices. The interpretative paradigm enables the researcher to uncover unique perspectives shaped by the participants' professional contexts and personal interactions with ecological themes in the classroom [6].

Participants

The participants consisted of seven English department lecturers from Kokand University. Each participant had over ten years of teaching experience and demonstrated a deep engagement with language teaching practices. Their insights on incorporating ecological awareness into classroom teaching were invaluable for this study. All participants gave informed consent to participate in interviews, which were audio-recorded for accuracy.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data, allowing participants to share their teaching experiences and perspectives on integrating ecological awareness into their practices. The interview questions focused on:

1. How participants use storytelling as a pedagogical tool to address ecological issues.
2. The challenges they face in fostering ecological awareness in a diverse classroom environment.
3. The role of teaching culture in shaping students' ecological consciousness.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method suited for understanding personal experiences and their broader cultural significance [7]. The process involved:

1. **Transcription:** All interviews were transcribed for detailed analysis.
2. **Thematic Coding:** Recurring themes were identified, such as the influence of storytelling, the role of teaching culture, and the challenges of integrating ecological perspectives.
3. **Interpretation:** The data was interpreted to explore how participants' narratives reflected their approaches to fostering ecological consciousness.

Results

The study revealed that while individual faculty members in the English department at Kokand University can initiate efforts to integrate ecological awareness into teaching practices, systemic changes are necessary to cultivate a harmonious relationship between teaching methods and the physical environment. Advanced teaching practices emerged as crucial in aligning critical approaches with environmental issues at the higher education level.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of teacher awareness in shaping students' mental models and building new narratives through their language proficiency. This awareness is essential for implementing practical teaching practices that promote ecological consciousness. However, achieving this goal remains a challenge due to the need for skill-based training to equip educators with the tools required to foster sustainability in the classroom.

The study also found that teacher perceptions of sustainability and growth are significant in determining their effectiveness in promoting ecological consciousness. Many participants identified the lack of professional development opportunities as a barrier to progressive

teaching methods in the 21st-century classroom. Addressing this gap could enhance teaching practices and better align them with the demands of modern educational contexts.

Additionally, the English department's qualified staff plays a key role in ensuring that teaching materials and student learning outcomes meet contemporary pedagogical standards. However, participants noted the need for structured professional development models to engage teachers effectively. Such models could provide targeted training and support, fostering greater interest in incorporating ecological awareness into teaching practices [9].

Overall, the results underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that includes advanced teaching strategies, professional development, and institutional support to integrate ecological consciousness into English language teaching effectively. These efforts can help prepare students to navigate and address ecological challenges in their personal and professional lives.

Discussion

This study explored how English lecturers at Kokand University perceive and implement ecological consciousness in their teaching practices. The findings highlighted several key themes:

1. Stories as Catalysts for Ecological Awareness

One participant shared how childhood stories about farmers and animals inspired her lifelong connection to nature and influenced her teaching practices. She integrates similar narratives into her classes to help students understand ecological concepts and develop critical thinking skills. This aligns with research by Ablak and Yesiltas, emphasizing the importance of early ecological education in shaping positive environmental attitudes.

2. Interactive and Engaging Pedagogies

Another participant emphasized the need for dynamic teaching methods, such as interpreting ecological themes in literary texts, to foster student engagement. For example, she found that analyzing *The Hunger Games* through themes of human-nature relationships and environmental challenges was more impactful than traditional approaches like summarizing texts. This supports the idea that practical and creative teaching strategies can bridge the gap between theoretical content and real-world ecological issues.

3. Institutional Challenges

Participants identified institutional barriers, such as test-oriented curricula and a lack of practical ecological content in teaching materials. These limitations hinder the development of eco-friendly teacher-student relationships and reduce opportunities for meaningful

discussions about sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires a shift in educational priorities toward fostering ecological awareness as a core component of teaching culture.

4. Language and Ecological Consciousness

The study highlighted the importance of using the "language of stories" to connect students with environmental issues. Participants noted that storytelling fosters emotional and intellectual connections to ecological themes, helping students develop a sense of responsibility toward the environment. This finding resonates with Stibbe's concept of mental models, which underscores the role of language in shaping ecological perspectives.

Conclusion

The integration of sustainable teaching strategies is gaining prominence across various educational settings, reflecting the growing recognition of the role educators play in addressing ecological challenges. Research has shown that language use in the classroom significantly influences students' mental models, shaping their understanding of sustainability and their ability to act upon it [10]. While language inherently draws attention to the integrity of ecosystems and fosters positive change among learners, it is ultimately educators' knowledge and skills that determine how effectively this potential is realized.

Educators are uniquely positioned to guide students in opposing environmentally harmful practices and supporting actions that promote ecological justice and wellness in higher education. This requires teachers to stay informed about current environmental issues and use language as a tool to impart a deeper understanding of ecological concepts. Through thoughtful integration of storytelling, critical thinking, and ecological awareness into teaching practices, educators can equip students with the knowledge and values needed to address the pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century.

The responsibility lies with teachers to create a dynamic and meaningful learning environment that not only enhances students' language proficiency but also empowers them to contribute to sustainable development. By fostering an ecological perspective in the classroom, educators play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation's capacity to sustain and improve the world they inherit.

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