A lush, misty forest scene with a stream flowing over mossy rocks. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees and vibrant green foliage. The stream is small and clear, cascading over large, moss-covered boulders. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

Ecolinguistics in Language Education: Promoting Ecological Wellbeing and Sustainability in the Classroom

Robert Poole

The University of Alabama

Agenda

- An introduction to ecolinguistics
- Ecolinguistics for language education
- Eco-critical language awareness (Eco-CLA)
- Applying Eco-CLA in the classroom



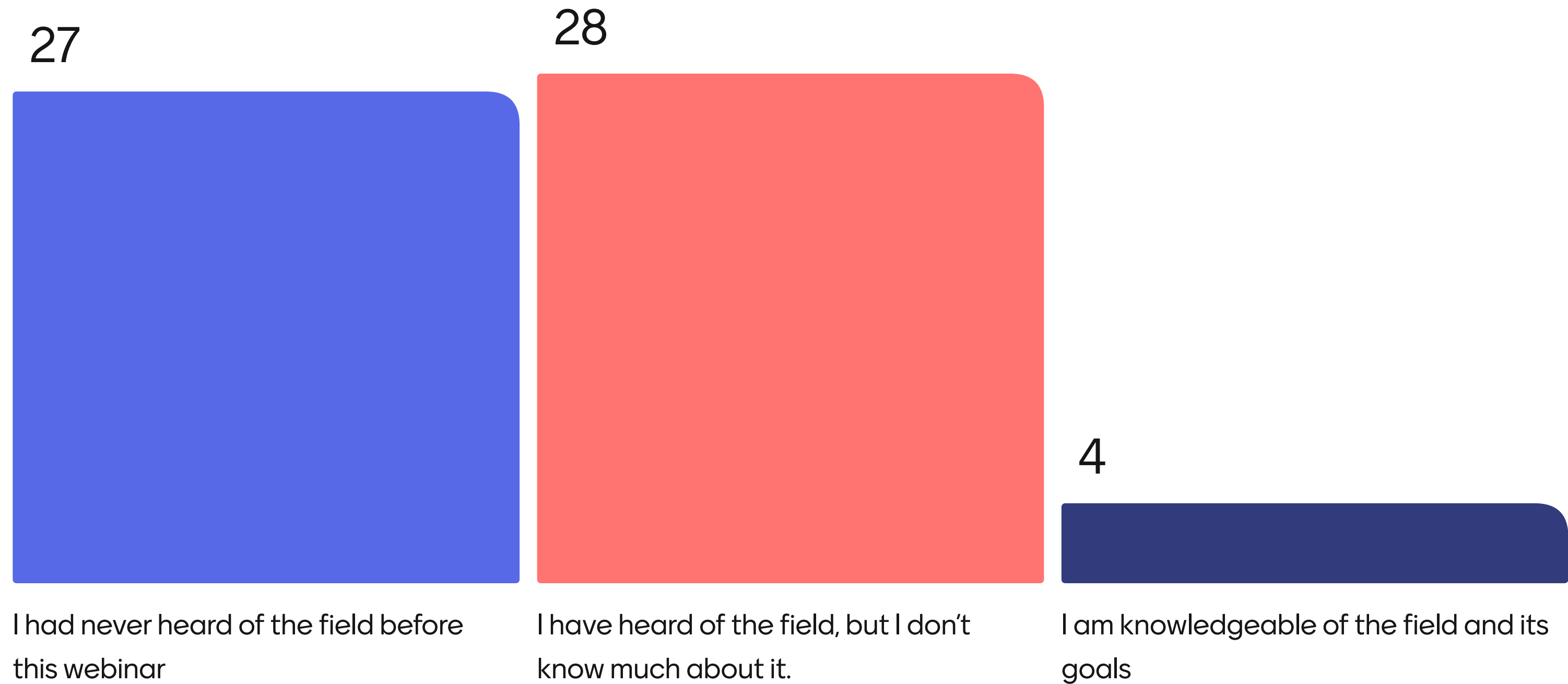
Introduction





What is ecolinguistics?

How familiar are you with ecolinguistics?



Ecolinguistics

"explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment.

The first aim is to develop linguistic theories which see humans not only as part of society, but also as part of the larger ecosystems that life depends on.

The second aim is to show how linguistics can be used to address key ecological issues, from climate change and biodiversity loss to environmental justice".



Key Aims

- to challenge and critique language practices which normalize and reproduce ways of being/speaking which contribute to climate change, resource depletion, pollution, animal suffering, etc. and that fragment humans from the more-than-human world
- to identify and promote language use that more positively aligns with and contributes to wellbeing, sustainability, and justice for humans and the more-than-human world.

These aims
can be
achieved in
the language
classroom!

- to challenge and critique language practices which normalize and reproduce ways of being/speaking which contribute to climate change, resource depletion, pollution, animal suffering, etc. and that fragment humans from the more-than-human world
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a growing field

- formation of the International Ecolinguistics Association → approximately 1,500 members
- launch of *Bloomsbury Advances in Ecolinguistics* series → numerous titles, e.g., *TESOL and Sustainability*; *Ecolinguistics & Environmental Education*; *Ecological Communication and Ecoliteracy*
- numerous gatherings for International Conference of Ecolinguistics as well as regional events
- rapid growth in publication
- Dedicated journals: *Language and Ecology* and *Journal of World Languages*
- publication of multiple special issues in journals
- [free online class from Prof. Stibbe and IEA has had greater than 5,000 participants](#)

Resources

- The International Ecolinguistics Association maintains a free, publicly available bibliography on Zotero
https://www.zotero.org/groups/4469955/ecolinguistics_bibliography
 - As of April 1, there are 735 publications entered in the bibliography—international representation, numerous journals, increasing # of monographs
 - Numerous entries connecting ecolinguistics and language education
- Free journal: *Language & Ecology*
- Lots of resources on the IEA website
- free online course supported by the UN

UN SDG:Learn Learning Assessments Blog Podcast Communities

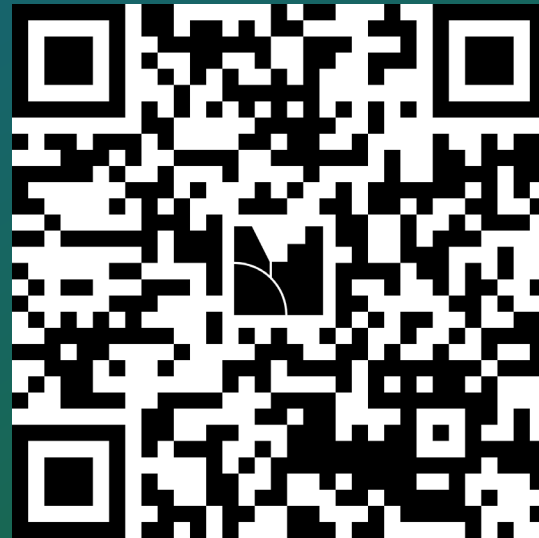
COURSE Self-paced e-learning UN Partner

**The Search for New Stories to Live By:
Econarrative and Ethical Leadership**

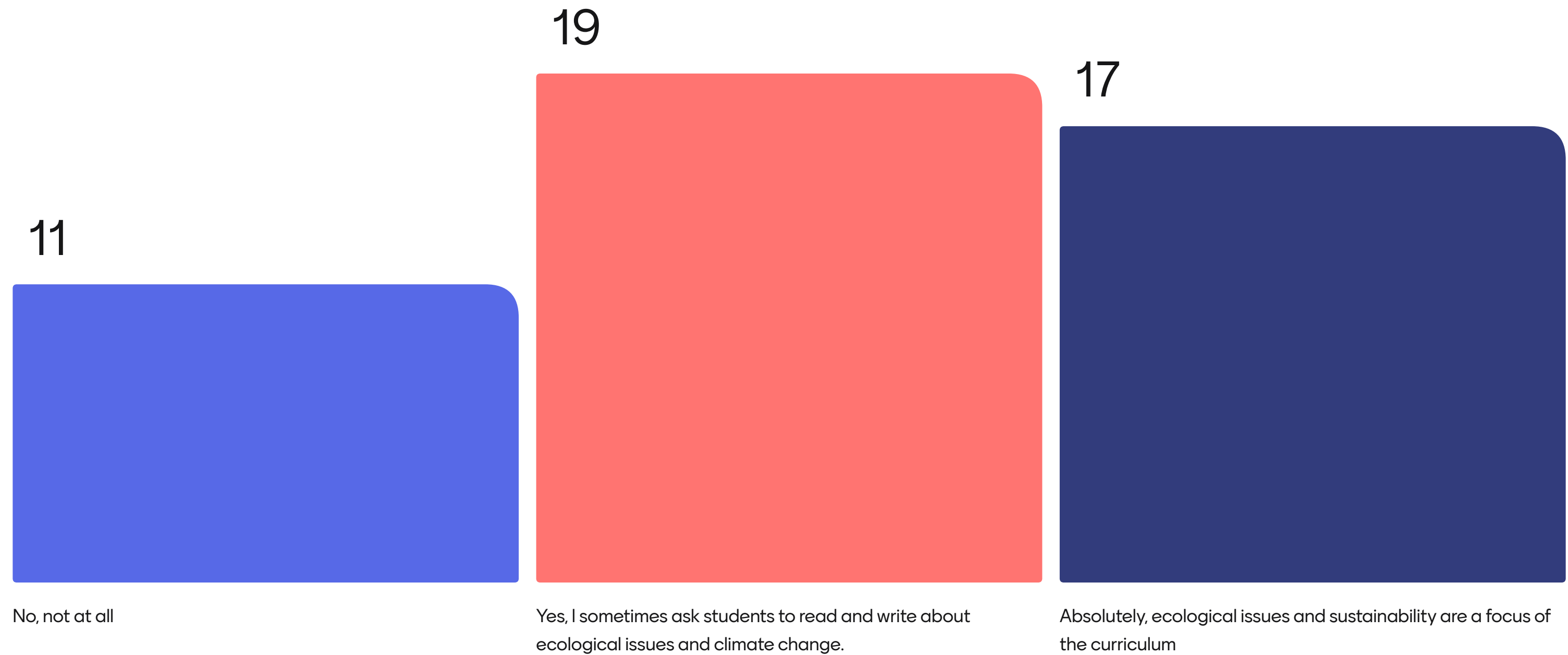
Offered by
University of Gloucestershire


Questions?

Ecolinguistics and (English) language teaching and learning

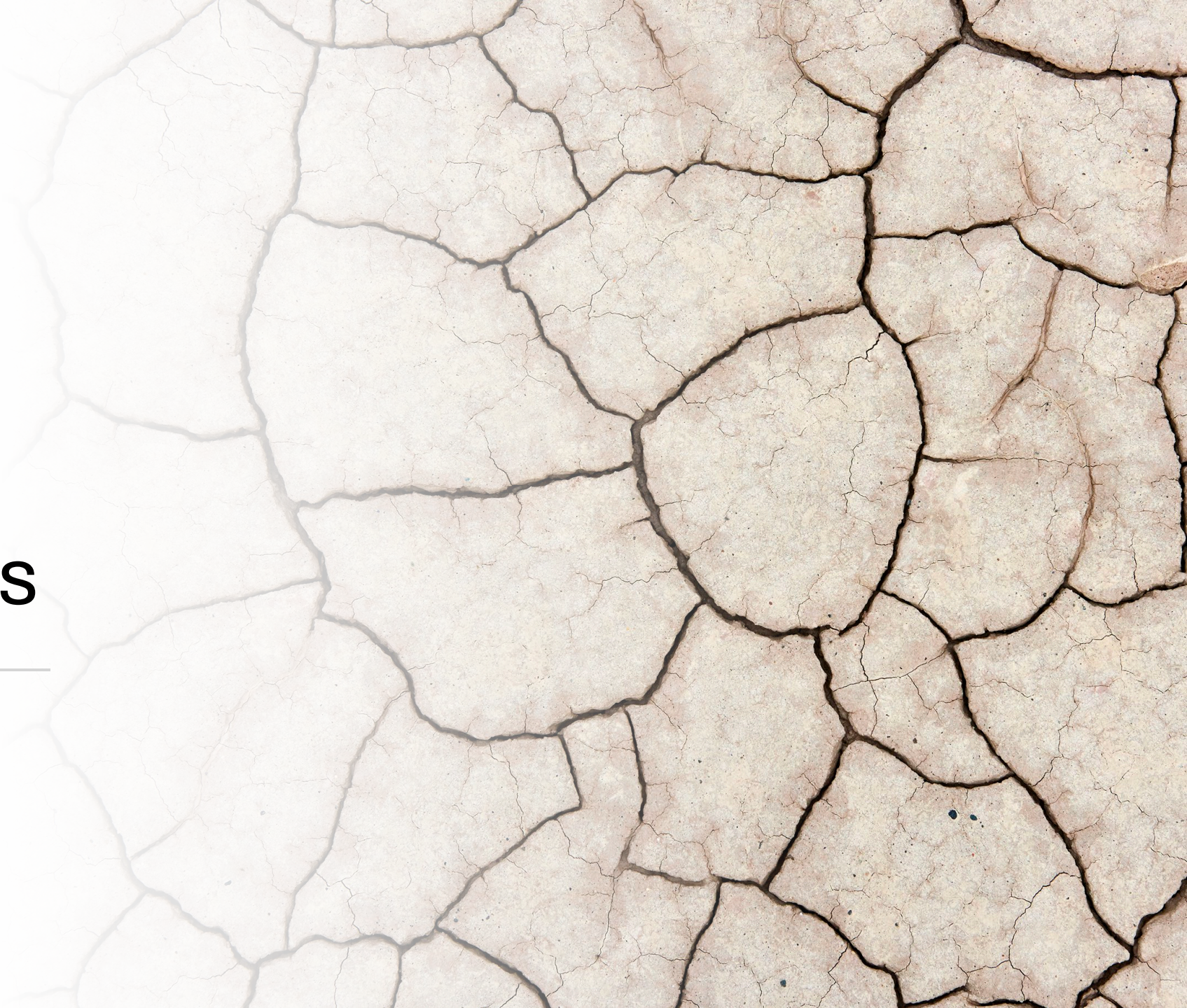


Are ecological issues and climate change a part of your language curriculum?





**Ecological
crisis,
migration, and
our classrooms**



“Environmental sustainability is not just a topic for classroom discussion, a theme for treatment in the curriculum, or one more social issue that demands critical thinking among our students”
(Canagarajah, 2020, p. x)

- +
 - Research on materials and textbooks



Two noteworthy early studies

Jacobs & Goatly (2000)

- Analyzed ELT textbooks produced by South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SAEMEO)
- 134 “mentions” of environmental topics but only 2 encouraged action
- “shallow environmentalism”

Stibbe (2004)

- Analysis of ELT textbooks in Japan
- narrow presentation of ecological disasters with no acknowledgement of cultural, political, and social factors

The work is global!

- Brazil: Cristovão, Sanches, & Smart, 2022
- Pakistan: Zahoor & Janjua (2020); Shah et al. (2025)
- United Kingdom (Akçeşme, 2013)
- Jordan (Al-Jamal & Al-Omari, 2014),
- China (Wang & Zainal, 2024),
- Indonesia Luardini & Sujiyani (2018); Triyono, Sahayu, & Fath (2023)
- Morocco: Laaloua & Tamer (2022); Mliless & Larouz (2019)
- Iran: Faramazzi & Janfeshan (2021)



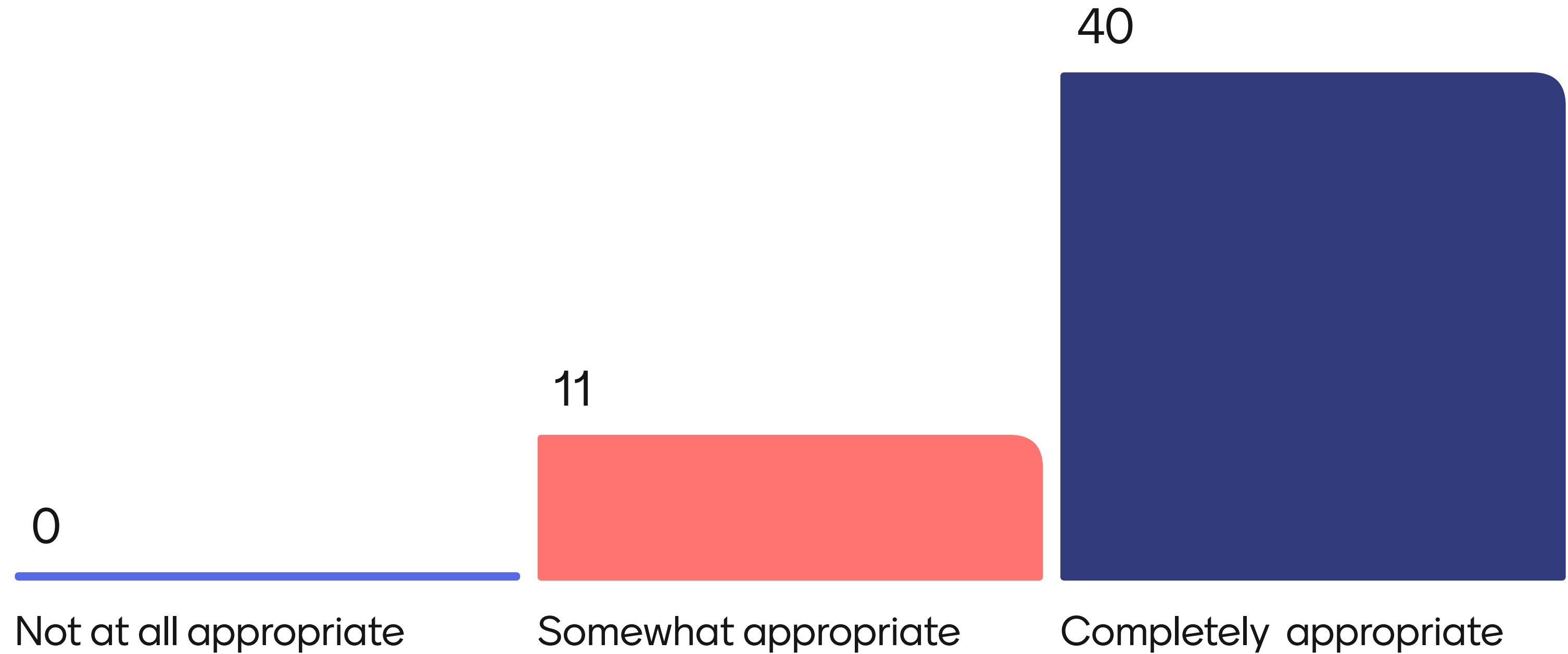
Ecolinguistics in the language classroom

The underlying premise



- “English language teaching should not only focus on furnishing learners’ language skills but also on raising their awareness about global issues, like environmental crises” (Zahoor & Janjua, 2022, p. 321)
- ELT materials should “help learners develop their ecological consciousness in a way that impact their lives positively” (Al-Jamal & Al-Omari, 2014, p. 321)

To what extent is it appropriate to address social issues such as climate change in language curriculum?



Poole (2016): Analyzing texts

- Local relevance: Collected texts from two groups in the community—an environmental group and the mining corporation
- The texts from oppositional groups made contrastive analysis possible
- Learners were able to connect differences in language choices to distinct ideological positions, thereby heightening their awareness concerning language and how it mediates relationships with the environment
- involved reading texts, analyzing language use, discussion with peers, reporting data, writing an academic essay
- in the next assignment, they analyzed an issue of their choosing and then created a public argument (e.g., brochure, video, website) targeting a particular audience

Damico, Baildon, & Panos (2020): Developing climate justice literacy

- guides students to examine the stories we live by, or the larger narratives that guide individual and collective sensemaking about relationships between humans and the environment
- integrates critical text analysis with ecolinguistic concept of stories we live by
- Through ecolinguistics-informed critical literacy principles and practices students explore questions such as:
 - Where do these stories come from?
 - How do they shape our understandings and experiences?
 - What are the consequences of these stories—benefits, drawbacks, and limitations—and for which populations?

Kanwal (2024): Integrating the UN SDGs

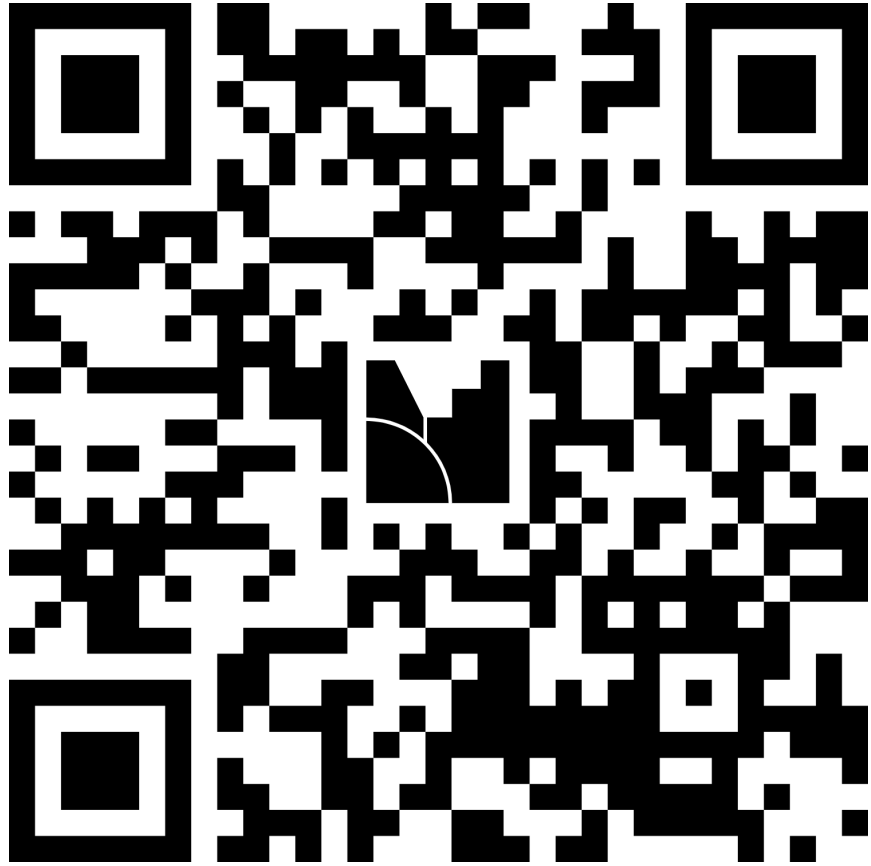
- A study of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia their integration of UN SDGs into their university level courses
- Two groups
 - Group one: Receives instruction that integrates SDGs in the curriculum
 - Group two: Receives “traditional EFL instruction” [no projects about sustainability and SDGs]
- SDG approach significantly impacted student engagement and indicates SDG-informed curriculum can be “a powerful catalyst in enhancing students’ involvement with crucial global challenges”, demonstrating the efficacy of integrating global matters such as climate change into language education to motivate student engagement (p. 1599)
- “curricula infused with SDG themes augment student motivation and foster a keen interest in global sustainability issues” (p. 1599)

Saiful & Shein (2025)

- “ELT holds the potential and responsibility to foster students’ sustainability values when students learn environmental topics in English lessons” (p. 339)
- Tested “eco-critical approaches” for fostering “nature connectedness” amongst students in an EFL classroom in Indonesia
- Of the two, the “ecosystem-spirituality-centred approach” more effectively cultivated a “sense of unity with nature” and an interest in “the well-being of sacred nature and their awareness of their divine role as Earth’s stewards”
- The second, “the ecosystem-centred approach” developed “students’ environmental emotional reasoning to protect nature”; as they demonstrated greater care for nature, their feelings of “nature connectedness” also increased
- Conclusion: The results indicate that “ELT can fulfill its social responsibility by promoting

Saiful & Shein (2025)

1. Conclusion: The results indicate that “ELT can fulfill its social responsibility by promoting ecological thinking and addressing environmental issues through ecocritical English instruction” (p. 345)
2. A final point from their conclusion: “Teachers can use environmental English texts, including poetry and spirituality texts such as green versus relevant to learners’ contexts” (p. 345).



How do you *do*
sustainability in
your classroom?



Questions?



Eco-Critical Language Awareness





tesol **60**
international **YEARS**
association

First, Critical Language Awareness

CLA is “a perspective on teaching second, additional, heritage, or other languages that is based in values of social justice” (Crookes 2021: 247) with a goal “to educate critical, ethical and politically engaged citizens” (Achugar 2015: 1).

An Eco-CLA approach to language education

- CLA helps learners develop into democratic participants of their societies through a “critical consciousness of key [sociolinguistic] elements within their social and physical environment” (Fairclough 1992: 6).
- Eco-CLA can help learners reveal and challenge unsustainable practices and ideologies in their own communities while likewise cultivating more harmonious relationships with the more-than-human world

Eco-CLA in practice

- an eco-CLA approach to English language education aims at identifying and promoting language use which contributes to ecological sustainability, justice, and wellbeing.
- an eco-CLA approach enables learners to challenge the unsustainable “stories-we-live-by” (Stibbe 2015, 2021)
- An eco-CLA approach empowers learners to counteract negative discourses that perpetuate ecological harm with positive discourses that contribute positively to wellbeing



5 Principles of Eco-Critical Language Awareness

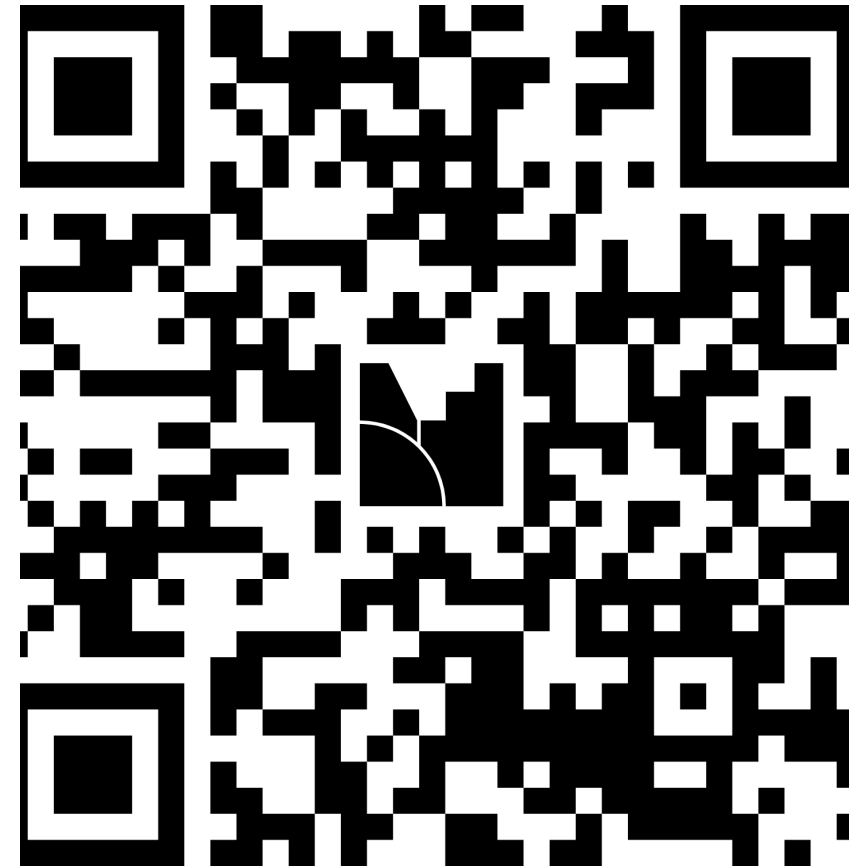
1. Eco-CLA promotes learning as physical and connected to local ecosystems.

Principle #1: The rationale

- practitioners must embrace the more than human world by opening the classroom door, studying what lies outside the windows, and going beyond the four walls
- **Localizing sustainability** is the most effective means to extend the classroom into the natural world, and educators need to engage learners' lived experiences to promote sustainability as they explore environmental issues that affect students' communities and ecosystems

Principle #1 in action

- Draw learner attention to environmental issues in their geographical locations and experiences (e.g., Haig, 2001; Goulah 2020; Poole, 2016)
- Engage with local/micro issues rather than global/macro ones
- Activities: nature observation, reflective writing, linguistics landscapes with an ecological lens



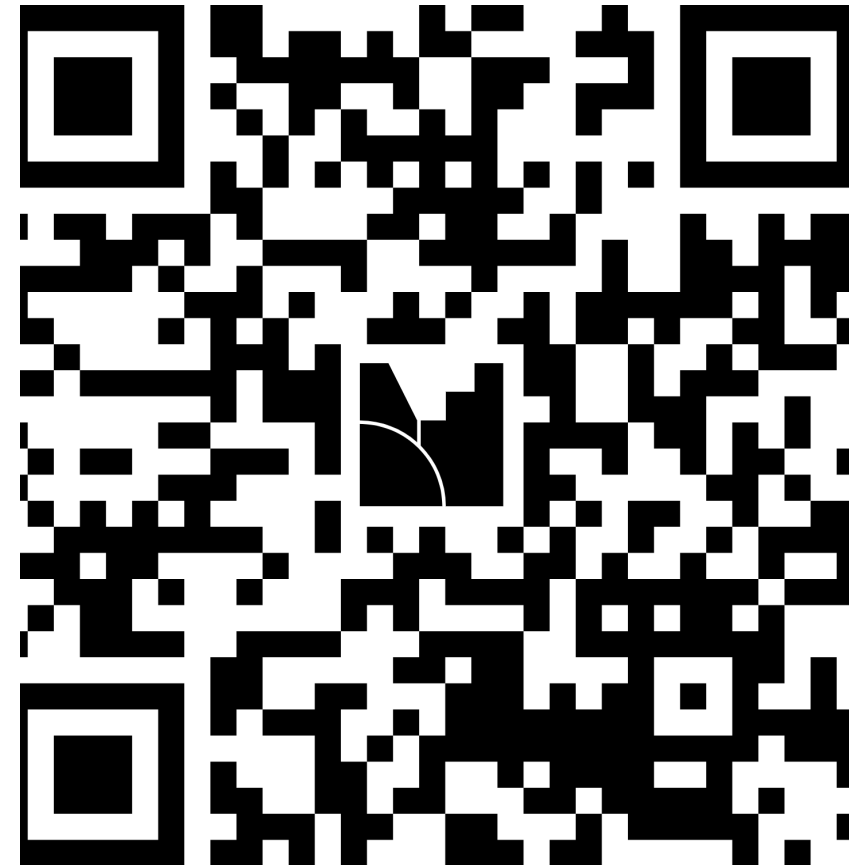
2. Eco-CLA recognizes and challenges unsustainable narratives.

Principle #2: The rationale

- Classrooms should help students to recognize the stories we live by (Stibbe 2015, 2021), e.g., growth is always positive, consumption brings happiness, humans are separate from nature
- Classrooms can provide opportunities for unveiling these narratives through discourse and literary analysis, affording learners a consciousness of the socio-political and environmental implications of texts and language use

Principle #2 in action

- Activities identifying and critiquing greenwashing from their daily lives
- Critique discourses such as fast fashion and generative AI to explore their impact on ecological wellbeing
- Analyze advertisements for the ecologically harmful actions and attitudes they produce



What is a local environmental issue that is meaningful to your community and your students?

Drought

Polluted river right next to school grounds.

traffic congestion

Data centers

High Temperature

Afforestation

Water resources/availability - Colorado water loss

Pollution - trash in the streets



What is a local environmental issue that is meaningful to your community and your students?

Air pollution, especially during and after the festival of Diwali

Reduction of green space

Drought

Data fever

Pollution and flooding

The quality of air, drinking water and etc. in cities. Especially metropolises where better sourced universities are.

Floods

Deforestation

What is a local environmental issue that is meaningful to your community and your students?

Data centers

Drought

Drought

Flooded areas because of heavy rainfall.

Water resources

air pollution

BIPOC neighborhoods with higher levels of environmental toxins

Cutting down trees nearby



What is a local environmental issue that is meaningful to your community and your students?

Grappling with promoting sustainability alongside promoting AI on campuses

Global warming, severe climatic issues like heat waves, severe cold

Pollution, drought

Building a new school on a hillside in a densely wooded nature area

Environmental impact of tourism during study abroad

Floods

High index heat

Floods



What is a local environmental issue that is meaningful to your community and your students?

Erosion

Environmental degradation and contamination

Water pollution

pollution

water shortage

Pollution of the Black Sea and its beach

Examples of texts, advertisements, etc. that may encourage ecological harmful actions & beliefs or that mislead the public through "greenwashing"

Textbook images

“We are in the beginning of mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth”.



Greta Thunberg’s radical climate change fairy tale is exactly the story we need

Principle #2 in action

Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims



How to spot green washing

www.thesustainableagency.com 

BADLY THOUGHT-OUT BIG GESTURES:

A classic one when an idea has come from a marketing team instead of experts.

MISLEADING NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES

REBRANDING TO INCLUDE 'natural' PACKAGING

Products that change their look to apply the veneer of sustainability, but without actually changing anything.



MAKING THE PRODUCT PACKAGING GREEN

At its core, greenwashing is all about misdirection.

There are a few common tricks that you can watch out for to make it easy to spot greenwashing and dubious sustainability claims:

VAGUE 'GREEN-SOUNDING' LANGUAGE:

Look out for words that sound good at first but have no concrete meaning legally, like 'farm fresh' or 'conscious'.

IRRELEVANT CLAIMS:

Making a big noise about one tiny green attribute on an otherwise totally anti-green product.

SO WHAT SHOULD WE BE LOOKING OUT FOR TO KNOW IF A BRAND IS FOR REAL

Accountability

Ironically, truly sustainable brands are transparent about how they're affecting the environment.



Clear labeling

Sustainable products should include simple language labels about exactly what's in a product.

Accreditation

Don't just take brands' words for it. Look for companies that are audited or accredited by third parties.



Traceability

Some forward-thinking brands have been helping buyers track their products' sustainability using helpful tech.

thesustainableagency.com



EUROPE'S LOWEST FARES, LOWEST EMISSIONS AIRLINE

Everybody knows that when you fly Ryanair you enjoy the lowest fares. But do you know you are travelling on the airline with Europe's lowest emissions as well?

While aviation is responsible for just 2% of carbon emissions, our industry is determined to play a leading role in reducing emissions. Aviation already pays significant environmental taxes – this year Ryanair will pay €630m in environmental taxes in Europe.

Ryanair has the lowest carbon emissions of any major airline – 66g Co2 for every passenger kilometre flown. This is because we have the youngest fleet of aircraft (avg. age 6 years), the highest load factors (97% of seats filled) and newest most fuel efficient engines.

Ryanair is committed to cutting our carbon emissions further which is why we are investing over \$20 billion in new aircraft that will cut our carbon emissions by 10% by 2030 and lower noise emissions by a further 40%.

Many of our customers are now choosing to offset the carbon cost of their flight each time they book with us. We support them making that choice and we thank them for contributing to our 4 great environmental partners.

Find out more at www.ryanair.com/environment



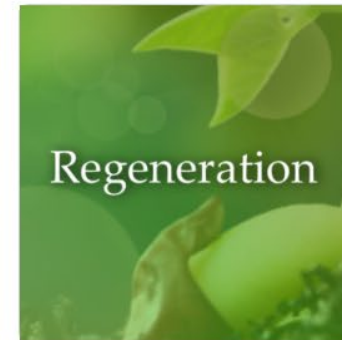
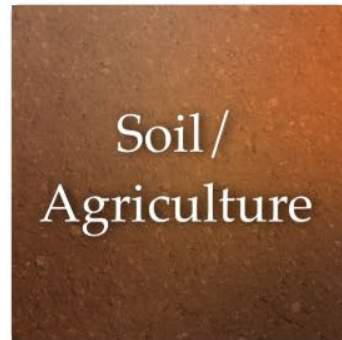
3. Eco-CLA promotes wellbeing and sustainability as common sense.

Principle #3: The rationale

- We must move beyond critiques and challenges to also praise and promote
- Through the practice of identifying and praising emergent and beneficial discourses, sustainability can become common sense to learners

Principle #3 in action

Ecopoetikon showcases the work of a diverse international network of ecopoets. We make available inspirational and thought-provoking work demonstrating engaged ecological and social consciousness. Our free website aims to engage a wider audience with ecopoetry and offers useful resources for teachers.



Mutia Sukma



Susan Richardson



Keijiro Suga



John Kinsella



**Felix Hugo
Noblecilla
Purizaga**



Tjawangwa Dema

Principle #3 in action

- Writing a personal ecosophy -- a framework against which discourses and actions may be judged as either ecologically beneficial or harmful
- The five elements of my ecosophy:
 1. wellbeing
 2. justice
 3. awakening
 4. compassion
 5. sustainability

4. Eco-CLA leads to sustainable ways of being and inspires sustainable advocacy.

Principle #4: The rationale

- critical language awareness in the classroom promotes action among students and educators (Valdés, 2014)
- Eco-CLA embraces this vision and asserts that once students have developed an ecosophy and have identified local environmental concerns, educators can help students transform those concerns into action

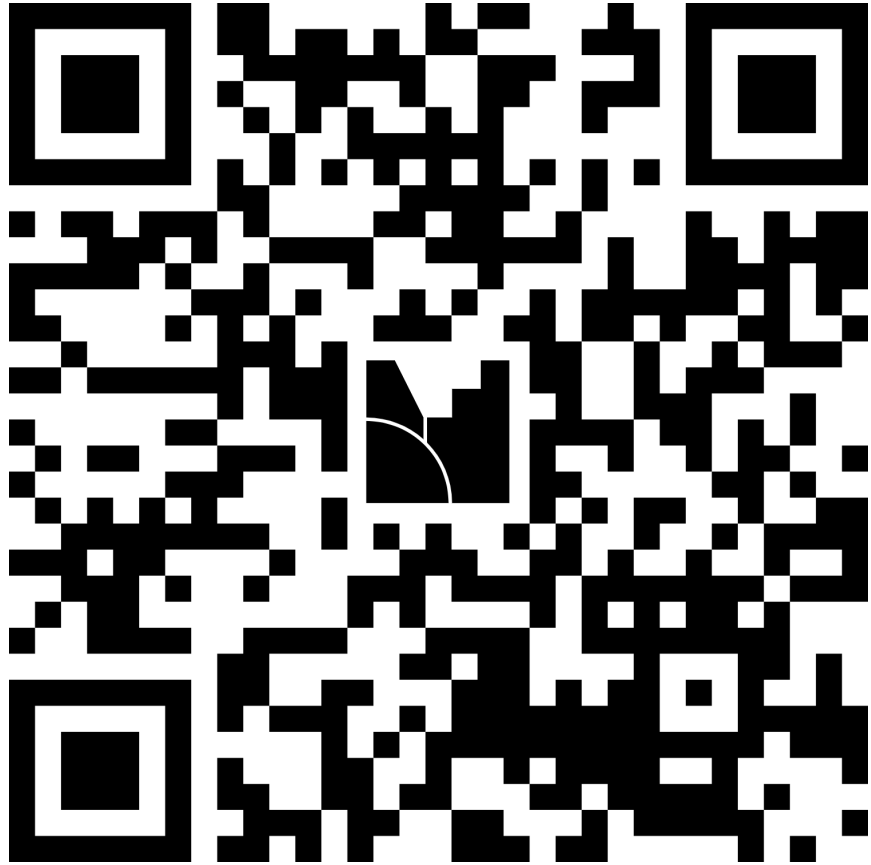
Principle #4 in action

- Builds upon the principle of local focus in principle 1
- Provides a space to implement student ecosophies in meaningful ways
- Sample activities:
 - With knowledge gained about a local environmental and with a personal ecosophy as a frame, students can produce research-based public arguments on their various issue in the form of...
 - infographics
 - blogs
 - youtube video
 - series of tiktok videos
 - brochure/flyer

5. Eco-CLA promotes language instruction that presents multiple English varieties as equal.

Principle #5: The rationale

- Eco-CLA invites us to imagine the classroom as a learning community that will develop linguistically as it interacts with the natural world beyond isolated classrooms, thereby adopting a more dynamic perspective on the complexity of English as a global language.
- Embrace linguistic diversity and to open themselves to the creation of anglophone identities that are rooted in their interactions with the natural world



What ideas for
Eco-CLA activities
do you have?

Closing Remarks

-
- - +
 -
- Questions or closing thoughts from you?

Two wonderful books!

Bellewes, E. (2024). *Ecolinguistics and Environment in Education: Language, Culture and Textual Analysis*. Bloomsbury.

A comprehensive discussion of ecolinguistics and its place in environmental education. An excellent resource for understanding the interface of ecolinguistics and education.

Goulah, J., & Katunich, J. (Eds.). (2020). *TESOL and sustainability: English language teaching in the Anthropocene era*. Bloomsbury.

An edited volume with inspiring contributions from an array of language educators on how TESOL is implicated in climate change and how TESOL can make sustainability a central part of its pedagogy and practice.

For more on Eco-CLA...

- Poole, R, Micalay-Hurtado, M., & Al, Y. (In press). Ecolinguistics. *The Palgrave Handbook on Critical Applied Linguistics*. Palgrave.
- Micalay-Hurtado, M. A., & Poole, R. (2022). Eco-critical language awareness for English language teaching (ELT): Promoting justice, wellbeing, and sustainability in the classroom. *Journal of World Languages*, 8(2), 371-390.

Email me at repoole@ua.edu for a copy!



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