

ENHANCEMENT OF ECOLITERACY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS USING SONG LYRICS

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Abstract

This study explores song lyrics to use in language teaching to enhance students' ecoliteracy while developing their language competency. Today's language teaching goes beyond language proficiency and capability to address such emerging issues in society as ecological crises. The inclusion of authentic teaching materials like song lyrics may motivate learners to be proficient as well as ecoliterate. The methods used in this research includes data selection, i.e., song lyrics from *KePal-SPI*, *Navicula*, and *Burgerkill* that can be utilized in ELT; data analysis consisting of paraphrasing, speculating, and interpreting of the song lyrics; and evaluating their thematic and linguistic appropriateness for classroom use. The results show that, *first*, the five-song lyrics reveal ecological problems like deforestation and biodiversity loss that the singing artists lament and call for preventive actions. *Secondly*, song lyrics may offer imaginative use of language that can enable learners to think critically and creatively, hence useful language teaching materials.

Keywords: ecoliteracy, language teaching, song lyrics

Introduction

No damage is irrevocable except ecological damage. Environmental destruction, mostly human-made, has continued to rage in the post-pandemic world. The decline in the quality of human life and that of the natural and social environment are interconnected. Climate change, global warming, and social and environmental injustices remain the big challenges near the third decade of the 21st century. As it is, a total paradigm shift should be made mandatory in the world of education towards Ecohumanistic pedagogy. Nowadays, education is even more entrusted with global consciousness-raising. It should promote ecological insights, environmental ethics, awareness of nature conservation, and other important values to the learners. Speaking in celebration of World Teachers' Day, two ELT authors Ceri Jones and Katherine Bilsborough called for ecoliteracy in language learning. Ecoliterate language learners are prepared to use their holistic ability to participate in creating a sustainable society (Jones & Bilsborough, 2021).

At the more parochial level, the implementation of sustainable education in Indonesia is underway but more works need to be done. Numerous studies on the

theory and practice of environmental education in Indonesia concur that ecological literacy should be best planted as early as possible (e.g., Harlistyarintica et al., 2017; Purwanti, 2017; Paradewari, et al., 2018; Wirawan, 2019). Scholarly works on the wealth of contemporary and traditional works of literature with environmental perspectives are also plentiful (e.g., Suwandi, et al., 2017; Sukmawan & Setyowati, 2017). However, sustainable education has yet to be made a top priority and explicitly stated in the curriculum. For example, the KKNi (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia) or IQF (Indonesian Qualification Framework) does not mention sustainable environmental issues. Based on the national qualification, the desired moral and ethical competencies to accomplish by Indonesian learners can be summarised as follows.

1. Devotion to One All Mighty God
2. Possession of excellent morals, ethics and personal identity in carrying out her/his duties
3. Pride and love toward her/his nation and faith in world peace
4. An ability to work in teams and attest compassion to social, community and environmental issues
5. Valuing diversity in culture, vision, beliefs and religion as well as appreciating patent and property rights
6. Respecting law enforcement and demonstrating spirit to put priority to national and public needs. (Directorate General of Higher Education Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2012, p. 25).

If at all, environmental concern is articulated in Priority # 4, namely the ability to work in teams and to attest compassion to social, community and environmental issues. It is important that Ecohumanism be made a strategic choice. The implementation of education from elementary to tertiary level should ensure that the new generation gains ecological awareness through integrating earth care issues with the ideology, faith, and noble values that the students live by. Consequently, authentic curricular resources are necessary to help educators address crucial issues of the day such as environmental damage and its ensuing ecological and social impacts.

The aim of this study is therefore to propose song lyrics to use in language teaching in order to achieve a sustainable goal, i.e., integrating environmental issues while targeting language competency. Here, song lyrics are treated as representative social *objet d'art* for textual analysis, hence methodologically in line with the teaching of language and literature.

Integrating ecological issues in language teaching

In addition to developing interpersonal skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, language teaching should foster critical thinking and civic engagement. Students may become eager learners when they find personal connections in what they learn and their day-to-day lives. As they learn, students should be made aware that nature sustains life with which they are motivated to live a life that benefits people and the environment. An ecoliterate person is a whole person with ecological understanding whose hands-on civic participation helps

create a sustainable society and celebration of Creation (McBride, 2013; Orr, 2015). Orr speaks of ecoliteracy as the formation of attitudes. He writes:

If literacy is driven by the search for knowledge, ecological literacy is driven by the sense of wonder, the sheer delight in being alive in a beautiful, mysterious, bountiful world. (Orr, 2015, p. 23)

Like any teaching, character education is inextricably linked to ELT (Mambu, 2015; Dewi, 2019). Formation of ecoliterate learners, accordingly, should be made a curricular priority in today's teaching. Fostering character education and environmental ethics by way of literature to language learners is deemed necessary.

Critics spoke persuasively of the power of literature to address social issues since literature gives context-specific and fresh literary devices such as metaphors, imagery, and symbols to charm and motivate learners (Thornton & Cruz, 2013; Davis, 2015). More specifically, no cultural product is more authentic, context-specific, and easily reached than songs to utilize in language learning (Kennedy, 2014; Wolff, 2015). Kennedy has this to say further: "Song lyrics can be used in the language classroom as valuable examples of literary texts. Song lyrics are poems set to music." (2014, p. 303). The use of songs in language teaching is not only entertaining but also strategic to engage students in problems outside the classroom like the destruction of the environment, climate change, global warming, ecological injustices, etc. It is important to make class activities more relevant and realistic to students' day-to-day lives including earth care. What follows is further elaboration on the value of music as a cultural artefact in promoting environmental messages.

Revisiting studies on the power of music

The study of Fernández (2017) examines a number of song lyrics from the English band, *The Cult* using ecocritical lenses. This charismatic, mystical, and mysterious rock band led by Ian Astbury voices concerns on socio-political injustice, calling for human rights and freedom, as well as environmental protection. The entire discography of *The Cult* includes references to the universe which is also an area of interest for every member of the band.

Central to the work of Fischer (2021) is the contribution of music to environmental issues. The study highlights the ecological potential and relevance of the song lyrics of the Australian rock band *Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds*. This Melbourne-based band founded in 1983 by Nick Cave emphasizes the close relationship between plant health and human well-being through their songs. Fischer's study has proven the ecological forces inherent in Nick Cave's songs.

Meanwhile, Larsen (2018) conducts an ecocritical analysis of the song lyrics by *Jethro Tull*, a rock band from England. The album *Songs from the Wood*, released in 1977, celebrated paganism, forests, and the natural environment. Larsen uses the criteria established by the leading ecocritical critic, Lawrence Buell. Larsen's findings: there are violations of environmental ethics committed by humans as depicted in *Jethro Tull's* songs. Their songs help to raise awareness of environmental abuse.

While the wealth of studies above takes lyrics of Western songs as the formal object, the song lyrics of Indonesian rock or heavy metal bands have not been

studied much. Only several rock bands gain scholarly attention like *Navicula* (Moore, 2010; Pramundito, 2019) and *Marginal* (Prayogi, 2018). This present research is to continue the argument on the power of music in advocating environmental preservation. It attempts to fill in the gaps left in the previous studies by examining the song lyrics from *KePal-SPI*, *Navicula*, and *Burgerkill* that can be utilised in language teaching.

Method

This research is of qualitative-interpretative type using song lyrics as data. Following Kennedy (2014), it treats song lyrics as examples of literary texts, i.e., poems set to music to use in language teaching. Data used include song lyrics by three Indonesian rock bands, i.e., *KePAL-SPI*, *Navicula*, and *Burgerkill*. Except for songs written by *KePAL-SPI*, all song lyrics are in English and ready to use for analysis. The translation *KePal-SPI*'s song lyrics is done by the researchers. Table 1 shows the data used for analysis.

Table 1. Song lyrics as primary data

Song Title	Artist	Source
“Jaga Kampung”	<i>KePAL-SPI</i>	https://id.cafelagu.me/downloadmp3/Kt1kbEFFtvk/kepal-spi-jaga-kampung-full-album
“Balada Peladang”	<i>KePAL-SPI</i>	https://id.cafelagu.me/downloadmp3/Kt1kbEFFtvk/kepal-spi-jaga-kampung-full-album
“Harimau! Harimau!”	<i>Navicula</i>	https://www.songlyrics.com/navicula/harimau!-harimau!-a-tale-of-the-last-sumatran-tiger-lyrics/
“Do It Yourself Is Dead, Now We Do It Together”	<i>Navicula</i>	https://www.songlyrics.com/navicula/do-it-yourself-is-dead-now-we-do-it-together-lyrics/
“Undamaged”	<i>Burgerkill</i>	http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/burgerkill/adamantine.html#1

To analyse the five song lyrics, this study employs the steps suggested by Timpane (2001). Each line and stanza of the lyric is read to understand the use of diction, metaphor, structure, and its literal meaning. After analysing the language and content of the lyrics, the next step is speculation – what does the text say? The final step is to interpret the meaning.

Findings and Discussion

Lamentation of violence toward nature

It is hard to separate ecological problems from human beings' actions since it takes what Sastrapratedja called “ethical issues” (2015, p. 169) to act justly instead of pushing nature into destruction. “Balada Peladang” [The Ballad of the Farmer] by the music group *KePAL-SPI* laments the lack of environmental ethics of the logging companies that destroy the forest and the lives of the local populations. The song opens with a disclaimer: “*Beratus-ratus tahun kami sudah berladang / Sebelum Indonesia terlahir ami sudah berladang*” [We've spent hundreds of years farming/ Before Indonesia was born; we had already farmed] (1-2).

The next five lines repeatedly declare the routine activities seen in country life people as “fishing in the river”, “hunting animals in the woods” (3-4); They perform slash-and-burn sufficiently, claiming that they make farming as their habitual livelihood. The singing artists continue:

*Datangnya pabrik perambah hutan,
Menjarah hutan dan menghabiskan seluruh alam
Kami jadi kambing hitam (8-10),*

To be translated and interpreted as a reproach: When logging companies arrive, not only do they loot the forest but also make the local people scapegoats should a disaster occur. Unlike the companies, local people are aware that nature is not the repository of natural resources to serve human greed. Here we see that the depiction of violence toward nature is present in the lyric.

Indeed, Indonesia has contributed to the global crisis due to deforestation, the use of non-organic, engineered products, environmental pollution, and the socio-cultural impacts thereof (Hunga, 2013). The song is thus a warning as well as a lamentation. This song shows concern about people with power who have done wrong to nature and the less fortunate others by playing the blaming game.

For language learners, this song lyric is rich with figurative language, for example, the repetition of “kami” [we] in lines 3-7 and the metaphoric use of “scapegoat” (10). The farmers are aware that all things are interconnected. Water, plants, soil, animals, and people depend on each other to survive on this planet, to use Pope Francis’ words, “our common home” (2015, p. 2).

Similar to *KePAL-SPI*, the lamentation of the violent destruction of nature and the loss of biodiversity is the point made by *Navicula*. “Harimau! Harimau! (A Tale of the Last Sumatran Tiger)” is one of *Navicula*’s famous songs taken from their album titled *Love Bomb*. Different from *KePal-SPI* with their songs written in Indonesian, *Navicula* released both Indonesian and English albums. The following lyrics can be readily used in ELT class. To quote the lyric in full,

Tired tones leading the way
No unknown foliage falls away
Claws create fear dominates
Near the end nature strives to change
Do you care I'm longing for home
As I face the future all alone
Harimau!
Sumatera skies colored in red
Guns to fangs... fury takes today
People cheer as angels cry
By this bullet I have learned to fly
I need someone to love
As I face the future all alone
Harimau! Harimau!

Examining agency is important to deal with this song lyric. The speaker is a tiger or *harimau* being chased as shown by its bracketed title – A Tale of the Last Sumatran Tiger. The tiger in the story is perhaps a victim of the endangered animal

trade. Saying “tired tones leading the way / No unknown foliage falls away”, the speaker claims its familiarity with the Sumatran Forest (1-2) that is now no longer the tiger’s habitat. Harimau cries, “Do you care I’m longing for home / As I face the future all alone.” (5-6). Another threat to the tiger’s habitat is forest burning as evident in “Sumatra skies coloured in red.” (8). The tiger is a lone creature wandering out of the forest to save itself from extinction. The tiger’s cry is repeated near the end of the song: I need someone to love / As I face the future all alone / Harimau! Harimau! (12-14).

Next, to elucidate the song lyric, one must be knowledgeable about the plight of the tigers in their habitation. According to Fauna & Flora International (FFI), there are 400 Sumatran tigers left on this planet. This subspecies is on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The near extinction is caused by either tiger trafficking or the retaliatory killing of tigers that had harmed people or livestock.

Finally, what we can interpret from *Navicula*’s tiger story is that everything that lives on earth is interconnected. Every creature must take care of each other. The last three lines – I need someone to love / As I face the future all alone / Harimau! Harimau! – send the message of the interdependence of all life. Humans and nature are important to sustain life on earth.

In addition to its environmental message, “Harimau! Harimau!” is useful for language learners as it is rich in figurative language, for example, the use of synecdoche “claws” and “fangs” to refer to Sumatran tigers. Another example is the two rhyming lines –People cheer as angels cry / By this bullet I have learned to fly– that can be used to teach metaphor and paradox. The pairing “people-angels” and “cheer-cry” accentuates the violence done by human beings toward nature. The closing line is useful to teach paradox to EFL students. The word “bullet” that connotes with killing, death, extermination, etc. is self-contradictory when juxtaposed with the phrase “learn[ing] to fly”. In this way, the students sharpen their language awareness while shaping their ecological attitudes.

Petitions to care for nature

Humans play an important role in maintaining the balance of nature. This message is clear in the three-song lyrics discussed in this section. To begin with *Navicula*, “Do It Yourself Is Dead, Now We Do It Together” can be easily recognized by an ecoliterate person as the song is a call for earth care. The first stanza declares the speaker’s support for forest conservation as follows.

Friends from the forest are calling me
I’m hearing them scream they want to be free
I want to stand with them and the tall trees
For it will be gone tomorrow (1-4)

Navicula is quick to point out that our planet and all creatures living inside are burning and immediate action is crucial to stop further damage. The lines “It’s wrong to believe there’s time to act tomorrow / Today is now tomorrow” (7-8) show the urgency of environmental protection. Global warming has become a reality. Climate change is triggered by irresponsible human activities. It affects all life on earth, including air, food chains, water cycles, plants, animals and other living beings.

The song title reflects the comradeship of people and nature represented by, respectively, the speaker and the forest. The following stanza explains people-nature solidarity, thus:

Dead trees marking my way, it all disappears, that's why I'm here
I keep finding my way, so that one day
My darling we'll walk through the green (11-12)

The rest of the song is an advocacy for earth care.

Next, a stronger appeal comes from the second song discussed herein. In 2018, *Burgerkill* released an album titled *Adamantine*. The album contains one song called “Undamaged” which one can interpret as an appeal to care for nature. No word “don’t” is used in the song since the petition is stated in three declarative sentences as follows.

You cannot destroy what you did not create
You cannot destroy what you did not create
You cannot destroy what you did not create (1-3)

Prohibition not to destroy things is clear in the song lyric. The modality “you cannot” repeated three times strengthens this appeal. Various creatures on earth are given by nature for free – a gift from the Creator to use for people’s needs, not people’s greed.

Meanwhile, the third song lyric “Jaga Kampung” from *KePal-SPI* is another petition for environmental protection. The song title loosely translated “Protect your village”, is an appeal not to destroy the inherited land from the ancestors – a gift from the Creator. The speaker in this song begins with a What If Question: *Pabila suatu saat nanti tanah-tanah di kampungmu tlah habis / Diambil oleh pabrik dihilangkan hutanmu apa yang hendak engkau lakukan / [If one day the land in your village is gone, taken by the factory; and the forest is cleared, what will you do?]* (1-2). This question is immediately answered thus:

*Kurasa takkan ada lagi
Nyanyian syukur petani diladang
Anak-anak bermain di antara pematang
Mungkin semua tinggal pematang (3-6)*

[I think no more
Farmer’s song of praise in the field
No more children playing in the ridge
Maybe all is lone rice field]

The song artists further address capital owners not to take over the ancestral land saying “Enough is enough”. If only they have a conscience, the lyric continues, they would not destroy God-given, irreplaceable forests and mountains. Multinational companies often take advantage of the local people, hence the petition.

In addition to examining the language used, language learners may also learn to be ecoliterate. They may interpret that there is a power relation by the use of the word “Tuan” [Respected Sir]; and the power relation is not simple either because the natural environment also becomes the victim. As stated in *Laudato si'*, technological and economic developments that hardly make a better world and quality of life cannot be considered progress (Francis, 2015). The Pope has repeatedly reminded us that the loss of biodiversity means a decrease in the quality of human life as well as social decline. The damaged environment can no longer be repaired but can only be conserved to prevent further damage. Here *KePAL-SPI* uses the imperative “jangan” meaning “do not” to express concern and an invitation not to harm nature.

It can be said for now that the three song lyrics above send the same message that people play an important role in maintaining the balance of nature. Systematic natural destruction is done by living creatures called humans, hence the petition to stop further damages.

Conclusion

This research has shown that song lyrics become useful means of awareness raising. Deep reflections on the impact of environmental pollution and natural disasters are found in the five-song lyrics by *KePal-SPI*, *Navicula*, and *Burgerkil*. Two main themes emerge in the song lyrics discussed, i.e., the lamentation of natural disasters and advocacy for nature conservation. As shown from the analyses of the lyrics, the three indie group bands demonstrate a commitment to the care of nature. This research has also shown that through the use of symbols, metaphors, stylistics, and other literary devices, the song lyrics offer useful teaching materials for language learners. The lyrics of the songs are more than just words; They function as powerful social artefacts that can inspire, motivate and educate people to become ecoliterate.

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