

# The Inclusion of Environmental Education for the Second Year College Students' Writing Class in Indonesian Context: "We Care"

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**Abstract.** This study is intended to describe 1) the students' overall ability in writing an opinion essay, 2) the students' reasons why environmental protection is important, and 3) the suggested actions to protect the environment as reflected in the students' essay. The design of the study was content analysis and descriptive quantitative design. The main instrument used to collect the data was documentation. The result of the study shows that the students' essays fall in the 'good' (46%), 'very good' (42%), and 'excellent' (12%) category according to the institutional standard. The two main reasons for preserving and protecting nature as given in their essays are 1) because human life depends on nature for food and protection and 2) because the earth is a home for all living beings. The actions to protect nature, among others, are 1) doing reforestation, 2) not doing overexploitation of natural resources, 3) keeping the environment clean, 4) doing selective logging, and 5) not dumping waste on the river. The study suggests that the use of environmental topics in language classroom enable the students to write better, strengthen the students' environmental awareness, and raise their critical thinking ability to solve the environmental problems.

**Keywords:** *environmental education, opinion essay, writing*

## INTRODUCTION

The baseline of assumption in writing this paper is that humans should take responsibility for the worsening environmental crisis nowadays. As the news of a natural disaster, droughts, forest fires, floods, and landslides occurred almost every day in mass media, and human tend to blame nature and excuses themselves of being innocent. In other words, when a natural disaster makes people suffer, people would say that nature is evil [1]. Nature can renew itself through disaster, and one example

is through a forest fire [2]. Yet, there is a great probability that many of the disasters are caused by human's misconduct to nature by overexploiting its resources.

Thus, it becomes crucial to make the future generation have a caring attitude to nature and preserve what remains of it. United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have shed its concern for environmental protection since 1977 by holding the 1st conference on environmental education in cooperation with the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) in Tbilisi which produced five objectives of environmental education, namely Awareness, Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Evaluative ability, and Participation known as the Tbilisi Declaration [3]. The guiding principles, among others, are 1) to enable learners to discover symptoms and causes of environmental problems, 2) to help learners aware of the complexity of environmental problems that require critical thinking and problem-solving skills to solve them, and 3) to make use of various learning environments and teaching approaches by emphasizing on practical activities and direct experience to preserve nature [3]. The objectives of environmental education set by UNESCO-UNEP give a clear message that the key elements of environmental protection are action and participation.

Kumar states that educating young people about environmental awareness is important to take benefit in the future both for knowledge and welfare for life [4]. As stated by Setyowati raising the students' environmental awareness and instilling environmental values is critical [5]. One way to plant the seeds of the values and awareness is through schools as formal education. Schools also give teachers a chance to include environmental education through learning resources [6]. Concerning the teaching of English as a second (ESL) and foreign language (EFL), the inclusion of environmental education is highly possible because environmental issues are both content-based and theme-based [7], [8]. Within the scope of socially

responsible teaching, language teachers also share the responsibility to take part in making the world a better place while at the same time help the learners achieve their best in language proficiency [9].

The inclusion of environmental topics in ESL/EFL classrooms is not uncommon. Some research has been conducted to investigate how these topics are delivered and how it helps the learners achieved their best language performance in the Indonesian context. First, [5] state that environmental education can be applied in the genre-based approach (GBA) for teaching different kinds of texts (descriptive, procedure and narrative texts) through GBA teaching sequences. Second, Fauzan conducted a study to investigate the secondary school students' attitude and environmental awareness in Central Kalimantan and how they propose a solution to environmental problems [10]. His finding shows that the students have insufficient environmental knowledge and awareness, and have no proposes actions to avoid environmental damage. Other research also shows that environmental topics can be used to teach writing skills. It was found that in writing about an environmental issue, the type of openings used by the students in their first paragraph is funnel type (69%), questions (24%), and anecdote (7%) [11]. It was also found that when writing about an environmental topic, the students tend to organize the essays by using cause-effect relationships, problem-solving, and reasoning [12]. Even though research investigating the use of environmental topics for ESL and EFL classroom are abundant, yet, no studies are directed to find out what the students' write in their essay regarding environmental protection. Thus, this present study is aimed at investigating 1) the students' overall ability in writing an opinion essay, 2) the students' reasons why environmental protection is important, and 3) the suggested actions to protect proposed by the students.

**METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach focusing on content analysis design. Content analysis design aims to systematically convert a large amount of text into an organized and condensed summary of lead results [13]. The subjects of the study were 26 EFL students joining the essay writing course in the academic year 2019-2020 in English Education Study Program, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of PGRI Wiranegara, Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia. The main instrument used to collect the data was documentation. The researchers collected the students' essays after they were assigned by the writing lecturers to write an emphatic order essay (opinion essay) under the topic of Environmental Protection. The lecturer gave feedback several times in terms of idea development before the

students' essay was finally approved for submission.

The students' writing was coded by using their name initials, part of the essay, the paragraph, and the research question category. The process of data analysis follows model, namely data collection, data display, data reduction, and conclusion drawing [14]. Yet, to answer the research questions thoroughly, descriptive quantitative was also used to analyze the data. The students' essays were scored by using Jacobs ESL Composition Profile. This scoring rubric was used because it has been used by many researchers and practitioners in EFL and ESL context either in its original form or its adaptation form [15]. Finally, to find out the students' level in writing, the researchers decided to use the institution standard.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

**The Students' Overall Ability**

The students' writing was rated by Jacobs ESL Composition Profile which covers five elements, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics.

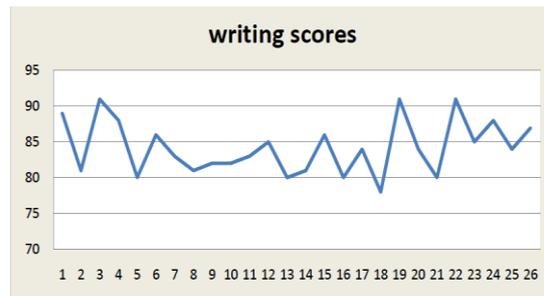


Figure 1. Score Distribution

Figure 1 shows that 4 students score 80, 3 students score 81, 84, and 91. One student scores 78, 87, and 89. And 2 students score 82, 83, 85, 86, and 88. Next, the students' scores are grouped based on the institutional grading standard, which falls into eight categories. The result of the scores category is in table 1.

When the students' scores were converted into the institutional standard, the majority falls in the above average category or into the 'good' (46%) and 'very good' (42%) category. None of the students' score falls in the 'average' and 'below average' category'.

**The Students' Reasons and Suggested Actions to Protect the Environment**

The students' essays state various reasons why they should care and protect nature. The reasons are stated explicitly in the essay, either in the body of the essay or in the concluding section. The data analysis shows that at least, there were 7 reasons

why a human should have a caring attitude toward the environment.

**Table 1. The Students' Overall Ability based on Institutional Standard**

Scores	Conversion	Frequency	%	Level
91 – 100	A	3	12%	Excellent
84 – 90	A-	11	42%	Very good
77 - 83	B+	12	46%	Good
71 – 76	B	0	0	Average
66 – 70	B-	0	0	Below Average
61 – 65	C+	0	0	Poor
55 – 60	C	0	0	Very Poor
41 - 54	D	0	0	Fail
Total		26	100	

**Table 2. The students' Reasons**

No	Reasons to Care and Protect Nature	Number of responds	%
1.	Human needs nature for survival (food and protection)	14	28%
2.	Home to all living creatures (human, animals, plants)	11	22%
3.	To avoid natural disasters (floods, draughts, landslides)	8	16%
4.	Legacy for next generation	7	14%
5.	Bad treatment to Nature results in bad life	5	10%
6.	Forest provides clean air and water	4	8%
7.	To avoid human-animal conflicts	1	2%
Total		50	100%

The students' reasons to protect the environment can be seen in the extracts of their essay presented below.

*The first reason why we should care about nature is that nature is a home for living things, such as humans, animals and plants. Nature gives us a place to live and do all the activities in it. When we hear the word "home", of course, what is in our mind is comfort. Therefore, it depends on us as its occupants who can create comfort. If we always want to live in comfort, we should always care about it by preserving it. If we do not do this, we will feel the effect. For example, deforestation makes the animals who lived there become lose their habitat. It makes them difficult to survive because they lost their home. Then, it can make the species in that forest extinct. It also has an impact on their ecosystem because of the composition of the food chain, which exists in that environment is disturbed. The simple example that is affected by the extinction of animals is our grandchild in the future; they*

*just can know the animals from the story and look it at the picture. How sad if it happens because of their grandparents. (SirinSu/N-F/BofE/2ndPar/Rs)*

The students state their reasoning in the body of the essay. Many of them agree that human depends on nature to survive as nature gives food and shelter for them. The students also state in their essay that the creation of the earth is not only for humans. Earth is the home of all God's creation which includes all plants and animals. The interference of one life element will cause an imbalance in other elements. Thus, to create a balanced life, human has a greater responsibility to act as the guardian of the earth.

**Suggested Actions to Protect the Environment**

The students give some suggestions to protect the environment. The recommendations are written either in the body of their essays or in the concluding section. The students suggest 17 ways to care and protect the environment.

**Table 3. Suggested Actions to Protect Nature**

No	How to Protect nature	Number of responds	%
1.	Planting trees and reforestation	12	24%
2.	Use resources wisely (not exploiting it)	6	12%
3.	Keep clean the environment	6	12%
4.	Not to cut down trees illegally and do selective logging	4	8%
5.	Not to dump waste on the river	4	8%
6.	Use more public transportation or use more energy-saving vehicle	3	6%
7.	Avoid forest clearing	3	6%
8.	Water-smart action (use it efficiently and responsibly)	2	4%
9.	Forest conservation	2	4%
10.	Treat nature well (do not set fire in forests, wet lands)	1	2%
11.	Life style change (reduce the use of plastics, not using bombs for fishing)	1	2%
12.	Building wild life parks/ national parks	1	2%
13.	Use paper wisely (use only when needed)	1	2%
14.	Care for plants and pets	1	2%
15.	Use energy-saving devices at home	1	2%
16.	Turn off lights when they are not in use	1	2%
17.	Recycle	1	2%
<b>Total</b>		50	100%

As reflected in their essay, most of the students believe that actions to preserve the earth can be started from small things, and their daily life

activities. Other suggestions were given by the students in the body of their essay targets bigger scope, such as oil palm plantation, mining companies, people in general, and the Indonesian government. Most of their recommendations to the wider scope of the audience are not to overexploit the Kalimantan forest, to stop forest clearing in Ponorogo, East Java, to stop illegal land mining in Kalimantan, and not to throw waste in the river, just like what happened in Ciliwung River in Jakarta. The students also give details in their essays about the effects that occur if the environmental destruction continues cannot be stopped. The natural disasters are pollution, greenhouse effect, landslides in Banjarnegara, Central Java, floods in Jakarta, and animal extinction (Sumatran Tigers, Rhinos, Sumatran elephants). Interestingly, many of the students state in their essay that it is the human's greed that caused environmental damage.

Nowadays, the study of environmental topics for a language classroom is common. Some research has been conducted in the area of the instructional material development involving environmental themes, teaching approaches, teaching techniques for a specific skill, environmental attitude scales, teachers' attitudes [8], [11], [12], [16]-[18]. UNESCO-UNEP's environmental objectives have become the guidelines to set up environmental education in the classroom [3]. Yet, when the objectives are studied carefully, awareness of environmental problems is actually superficial. Having the awareness of the problems, understanding why they occur, having the skills to solve the problems, and the ability to critically evaluate possible solutions are worthless if no actions are taken [19]. From this, it can be concluded that the main goal of environmental education actually is basically participation.

The result of the study shows that all students agree that without the proper attitude and behaviour toward the environment, no human life will be functioning as desired. The content of their essays also states, both implicitly and explicitly, that without environmental protection, the survival of human life is impossible on this earth. The result of the study supports the study that there is a linear relationship between environmental values and environmental responsibilities [20]. It says that students who have more environmental values tend to be more responsible for their surrounding. They suggest that formal education activities need to involve the enhancement of personal environmental responsibility among students.

The result of the present study shows that using environmental issues help students write better and to think critically. The evidence of writing better can be seen in the grouping of scores level in which none of them fall into 'below average' level. The students' ability to write well might be because of the teachers' feedback and the conference between

the two. Instead of giving feedback on grammar, the lecturer gave more emphasis on the content and organization feedback for the students' composition. Irwin states that it is important for writing teachers to give feedback, and the most preferable feedback is in content rather than in grammar [21]. Moreover, the students also prefer direct feedback to improve the quality of their writing [21], [22].

Meanwhile, critical thinking skills are reflected in their ability to analyze, to reasons, and to give possible solutions to the problems. Werner assert that making a decision and taking action are part of critical thinking skills [23]. Other forms of critical thinking skills, according to Geng are to make a judgment, to argue, to question, to process information, to solve a problem, and to make a disposition [24]. Interestingly, one way to see how these skills come into a function is through writing [25].

## CONCLUSION

Language teachers, or writing teachers, in particular, can use environmental topics to teach not only about the language but also the responsibility to solve global problems. Referring to the result of the study, it can be concluded that using the environmental issue for teaching writing in a foreign language context enables the students to write well. The students were able to develop the essay, and have sufficient analytical problem-solving ability in proposing solutions and ways to conserve nature. Incorporating environmental education into the language class gives a spark in the students' mind and heart that they are part of nature and need to participate in its sustainability actively. With the appropriate instructional materials and teaching approaches, language teachers can create the agents of change for environmental protection.

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