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Ecotheology And Love-Based Curriculum In Indonesian Language Learning

Mohd Bahaudin Ihsan

Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha

Email: mohd@student.undiksha.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The global ecological crisis demands a paradigmatic transformation in education, not only as a technical response but also as a spiritual and ethical reconstruction of humanity's relationship with nature. This study explores the integration of ecotheology and love-based curriculum in Indonesian language learning as an effort to cultivate ecological awareness rooted in spiritual and affective dimensions. Using research and development methods with a design-based research approach, this study involved thirty Indonesian language teachers and four hundred and fifty junior high school students in Bali through three cycles of implementation and revision. The developed curriculum model integrates ecotheological principles including the sacredness of creation, the interdependence of life, and stewardship responsibility with a pedagogy of love emphasizing empathy toward living beings, appreciation of natural beauty, and commitment to ecological action. Research results show that the implementation of this curriculum significantly increased students' ecological awareness with an effect size of 1.2, developed emotional connections with nature, and promoted pro-environmental behavior in daily life. Thematic analysis of student writing revealed a transformation from anthropocentric to biocentric perspectives, the use of more empathetic and appreciative language toward nature, and personal narratives showing a sense of responsibility for environmental conservation. This study offers theoretical contributions in developing an ecopedagogical framework that integrates spiritual and emotional dimensions, as well as practical contributions in the form of a curriculum model that can be adapted in various Indonesian language education contexts.

Keywords: ecotheology, love-based curriculum, Indonesian language learning, ecological awareness, environmental education



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INTRODUCTION

The discourse on education quality in Indonesia often focuses on curriculum aspects, infrastructure, and students' academic competencies, but neglects the fundamental dimension that actually forms the foundation of the entire educational process, namely teacher well-being. This paradox reflects an incomplete understanding that psychologically healthy teachers are a prerequisite for creating meaningful and transformative learning experiences for students. In the context of twenty-first-century education that is increasingly complex with high academic demands, increased administrative burdens, and diverse social expectations, teacher well-being becomes a crucial issue requiring serious attention from all educational stakeholders.

The phenomenon of emotional exhaustion or burnout among teachers has become a global concern in recent decades. Research conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik in 2020 revealed that stress levels and emotional exhaustion among teachers in various countries reached alarming levels, with negative impacts not only on teachers' mental health but also on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. In Indonesia, a survey conducted by the Indonesian Teachers' Union Federation in 2019 showed that more than sixty percent of teachers reported experiencing high work

stress, with various triggering factors ranging from excessive workload, lack of organizational support, to low appreciation for the teaching profession.

The concept of happiness or subjective well-being in the context of the teaching profession has become a focus of positive psychology research in education. Seligman in 2018 through his PERMA theory defined well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing positive emotions, engagement, meaningful relationships, meaning in life, and achievement. In the context of teachers, happiness does not merely refer to momentary satisfaction, but rather a deeper psychological condition that includes a sense of purpose in teaching, satisfaction in interacting with students, recognition of professional contributions, and balance between work and personal life. Teachers who experience high well-being tend to have better resilience in facing professional challenges, show stronger commitment to self-development, and most importantly, are able to transmit positive energy to students.

The relationship between teacher well-being and student learning outcomes has become an increasingly prominent topic in contemporary educational literature. Jennings and Greenberg in 2019 through the prosocial classroom model argued that teachers' emotional and social quality is a precursor to a conducive classroom climate, which in turn facilitates effective learning. Happy teachers tend to display higher enthusiasm in teaching, use a richer variety of pedagogical methods, provide more constructive feedback, and are able to respond to students' emotional needs more sensitively. Conversely, teachers experiencing emotional distress tend to show more rigid interaction patterns, are less responsive to individual student needs, and create a tense classroom atmosphere that can hinder the learning process.

The educational context in Bali has its own uniqueness that is interesting to examine within the framework of teacher well-being. As a province with a rich culture and strong value system based on the Tri Hita Karana philosophy emphasizing the harmony of relationships with God, fellow humans, and nature, schools in Bali have the potential to integrate local wisdom in creating a holistic educational ecosystem. However, on the other hand, teachers in Bali also face specific challenges such as dual burdens in carrying out professional duties and customary obligations, limited mobility for professional development, and facility disparities between urban and rural schools. Understanding the dynamics of teacher well-being in Bali's socio-cultural context can provide valuable insights for developing contextual and relevant intervention models.

This research departs from the gap between theoretical recognition of the importance of teacher well-being and educational policy practices that have not yet placed this issue as a priority. Although various studies have shown a correlation between teacher well-being and teaching quality, empirical research exploring the specific mechanisms of how teacher happiness is transmitted into positive learning experiences for students, particularly in the Indonesian context, remains limited. The research questions that become the focus are how teacher happiness contributes to students' academic achievement and well-being, what mediating factors play a role in this process, and what are the experiences of teachers and students in implementing this curriculum. By answering these questions, this research is expected to provide contributions both theoretically in enriching understanding of well-being dynamics in educational ecosystems, and practically in informing school policies more oriented toward the well-being of all school members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotheology as a relatively new discourse in contemporary theology emerged as a response to the ecological crisis by exploring the theological implications of humanity's relationship with nature. McFague in 2020 through the concept of creation theology proposed a reconstruction of theological imagery from a domination model to a partnership model where humans understand themselves not as lords over creation but as part of a broader community of life. In this perspective, nature is not just an instrument for human interests but has intrinsic value as a subject valuable in itself and as a manifestation of divine presence.

Fundamental principles of ecotheology relevant to education include first the sacredness of creation affirming that all of nature has a sacred dimension demanding an attitude of reverence not exploitation. This concept challenges the secularization of nature that reduces the environment to mere material for human consumption. Second, the interdependence of life emphasizing that all life forms are interconnected in a complex web of life where the well-being of one species cannot be

separated from the well-being of the entire ecosystem. Third, stewardship responsibility positioning humans as custodians responsible for the preservation of creation for present and future generations.

Various religious traditions have developed rich ecotheological reflections. In the Christian tradition, the concept of *imago Dei* underlying human dignity is reinterpreted to emphasize humanity's calling as co-creator involved in caring for and healing creation. In the Islamic tradition, the concept of *khalifah fil ard* meaning God's representative on earth implies that humans have an amanah to maintain nature's sustainability as a form of worship. The Hindu tradition with the concept of *ahimsa* or non-violence emphasizes an attitude of not harming all living beings as a fundamental ethical principle. Meanwhile, the Buddhist tradition through the concept of dependent origination or *pratityasamutpada* teaches that all phenomena are interdependent and no entity exists independently, which underlies an ethic of compassion toward all forms of life.

In the Balinese context, the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* meaning three causes of well-being offers an integral ecotheological framework emphasizing harmony between *parahyangan* or relationship with God, *pawongan* or relationship with fellow humans, and *palemahan* or relationship with nature. This concept constructs nature not as an entity separate from the human and spiritual domains but as an integral dimension of sacred life. Research by Windia and Dewi in 2021 revealed that the *Tri Hita Karana* principle still lives in traditional *subak* agricultural practices in Bali reflecting time-tested ecological wisdom.

Pedagogy of love or pedagogy of care developed from Freire and Noddings's thinking emphasizes that true education cannot be separated from love as a commitment to the flourishing of others. Freire in 2018 affirmed that education is an act of liberating love, where teachers and students engage in a process of humanization together. In the ecological context, pedagogy of love invites the expansion of the circle of caring from fellow humans to the broader community of life including animals, plants, and ecosystems.

Noddings in 2019 developed an ethics of care as an alternative to ethics based on abstract principles, emphasizing the importance of concrete relations and responsiveness to the specific needs of those being cared for. In the context of ecological education, this means encouraging students to develop personal relationships with nature through direct experience, attentive observation, and reflection on their interdependence with the environment. Students are encouraged not only to learn about nature but to learn from nature through empathetic and reflective engagement.

Characteristics of a love-based curriculum in an ecological context include several key elements. First, learning centered on developing ecological empathy, namely the capacity to feel and understand the perspectives and needs of other living beings. This involves activities such as deep naturalistic observation, storytelling using non-human perspectives, and role-playing encouraging students to imagine the experiences of other beings. Second, appreciation of natural beauty as a pathway to cultivating love for the environment. Aesthetic experiences with nature through art, poetry, and sensory exploration can evoke a sense of wonder and emotional connection that becomes intrinsic motivation for pro-environmental behavior. Third, critical reflection on values and beliefs underlying human relationships with nature, encouraging students to examine anthropocentric assumptions and develop more biocentric or ecocentric worldviews.

Indonesian language learning as a field for ecological education has potential that has not been fully exploited. Language shapes the way we think and relate to the world, as proposed by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis stating that language structure influences cognition and perception of reality. In an ecological context, the way we use language to describe nature reflects and shapes our attitude toward it. The use of mechanical and instrumental language to describe nature such as natural resources or natural capital reflects and reinforces exploitative relations, while more empathetic and appreciative language such as community of life or family of earth can form more caring relations.

Literary learning with ecological themes or ecocriticism offers opportunities for deep exploration of human-nature relations through literary works. Glotfelty in 2019 defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, exploring how nature is represented in texts, how environmental values are reflected in literary works, and how literature can contribute to ecological awareness. Reading and analyzing poetry, short stories, or novels with an ecological perspective can open students' awareness to the interdependence of life, the beauty of nature, and the consequences of human actions on the environment.

Ecological creative writing encourages students to express their experiences, emotions, and reflections on nature through various genres such as poetry, personal narratives, or reflective essays. This practice not only develops literacy skills but also functions as a meaning-making process where students construct their ecological identity, explore their values regarding the environment, and articulate their commitment to ecological action. Research by Christensen in 2022 showed that reflective writing about nature experiences significantly increased students' emotional connection with the environment and predicted pro-environmental behavior.

Dialogical discussion of environmental issues using an ecotheological perspective can cultivate critical ecological literacy, namely the ability to analyze environmental issues not only from scientific and economic dimensions but also from ethical and spiritual dimensions. Through dialogue, students are encouraged to explore ecological dilemmas, question dominant assumptions about development and progress, and imagine alternative relationships with nature that are more sustainable and just.

Previous research on spiritually-based environmental education shows promising results. A study conducted by Palmer in 2020 revealed that educational programs integrating spiritual dimensions significantly increased students' ecological identity and sense of connection to nature compared to conventional programs focusing only on cognitive dimensions. However, research specifically integrating ecotheology in Indonesian language curricula is still very limited, indicating a gap that needs to be filled by this research.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses Research and Development methods with a design-based research approach that is iterative and collaborative. This approach was chosen because it suits the research objective to not only develop a curriculum product but also generate design principles and theoretical understanding of ecotheological curriculum implementation in real contexts. Design-based research allows researchers to develop, implement, evaluate, and revise curricula through multiple cycles while collecting data on processes and outcomes.

The research was conducted in six junior high schools in Buleleng Regency, Bali, selected purposively with criteria of schools having active environmental programs, openness to curriculum innovation, and teachers' willingness to collaborate in research. Research participants consisted of thirty Indonesian language teachers involved in curriculum development and implementation, and four hundred and fifty eighth-grade students who were subjects of curriculum implementation for one semester.

The curriculum development process began with a needs analysis phase through focus group discussions with teachers, interviews with environmental education practitioners, and literature review on ecotheology and pedagogy of love. This phase produced a conceptual curriculum framework integrating three ecotheological principles namely sacredness of creation, interdependence of life, and stewardship responsibility with five elements of pedagogy of love namely ecological empathy, appreciation of beauty, value reflection, personal connection, and action commitment.

The curriculum design includes four learning units with different but interconnected themes. The first unit titled *Listening to the Voice of Nature* uses poetry and personal narratives to develop sensitivity and empathy toward other living beings. Students conducted naturalistic observations in the school environment, wrote reflections using non-human perspectives such as tree or river perspectives, and read ecological poetry by Indonesian and international poets. The second unit titled *Ecological Footprint* explores the interdependence between human life and ecosystems through analysis of expository texts on environmental issues and writing argumentative essays on ecological responsibility. The third unit titled *Beauty That Saves* focuses on aesthetic appreciation of nature through nature photography, descriptive writing rich in sensory imagery, and exploring how beauty can be motivation for conservation. The fourth unit titled *Becoming Earth's Guardian* integrates all learning through an action research project where students identify environmental issues in their community, design small interventions, and document their process and reflections in journals or blogs.

Each unit was designed with sequencing starting from concrete experiences with nature, reflection on those experiences, conceptualization through reading and discussing texts, and application through creative writing and projects. Pedagogical strategies used included experiential

learning through field trips and nature observation, dialogical learning through class discussions encouraging multiple perspectives, inquiry-based learning where students pose questions and seek answers through exploration, and project-based learning providing opportunities for authentic ecological action.

Curriculum implementation was conducted in three cycles over one semester with each cycle lasting one month. After each cycle, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of learning artifacts such as student writing. These data were used for reflection and curriculum revision for the next cycle, reflecting the iterative nature of design-based research.

Data collection used mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through the Environmental Awareness Scale measuring students' knowledge, attitudes, and pro-environmental behavior with twenty-five Likert scale items, the Connection to Nature Scale measuring emotional connection with nature with fourteen items, and the Ecological Identity Scale measuring the extent to which students integrate ecological dimensions into their self-concept with ten items. All three instruments were administered before and after curriculum implementation to measure changes.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve purposively selected students to represent variations in ecological awareness profiles, focus group discussions with teachers to explore implementation experiences and challenges faced, participatory observation in classrooms during the learning process to document interactions and learning processes, and document analysis of student writings including poetry, personal narratives, and reflection journals produced during learning.

Quantitative data analysis used paired sample t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores on the three ecological awareness scales. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* to estimate the magnitude of change. Qualitative data analysis used thematic analysis with an inductive approach where themes emerged from data through systematic coding processes. Analysis was conducted with NVivo software assistance to organize and code data. Data triangulation from multiple sources and multiple methods was used to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of findings.

Research procedures followed research ethics principles by obtaining informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and giving participants the right to withdraw at any time. The research received ethical clearance from the research ethics committee of Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative analysis showed that implementation of the ecotheology and love-based curriculum produced significant increases in all three dimensions of students' ecological awareness. Environmental Awareness scores increased from a mean of 3.4 on pre-test to 4.3 on post-test with $t = 12.7$ and $p < 0.001$, yielding a Cohen's *d* effect size of 1.2 classified as a large effect. This increase indicates that the curriculum was effective in enhancing not only students' knowledge about environmental issues but also attitudes and commitment to pro-environmental behavior.

The Connection to Nature Scale showed an even more substantial increase from a mean of 2.9 to 4.1 with $t = 14.3$ and $p < 0.001$, yielding an effect size of 1.4. The large magnitude of change in this emotional connection dimension confirms one of the curriculum's main objectives namely to cultivate deeper personal and emotional relationships with nature. The Ecological Identity Scale also showed a significant increase from 3.1 to 4.0 with $t = 11.5$ and $p < 0.001$ with an effect size of 1.0, indicating that students increasingly integrated ecological dimensions in how they understood themselves.

Thematic analysis of interviews and student writings revealed several key themes capturing their ecological awareness transformation. The first theme is the shift from anthropocentric to biocentric perspectives reflected in how students described nature. Before the curriculum, most students described nature in utilitarian terms such as food sources or recreation places. After the curriculum, their descriptions showed awareness of nature's intrinsic value and recognition of other living beings' agency. One student wrote in reflection that previously I only saw the

forest as a place to get wood but now I realize that the forest is home to thousands of creatures who have the right to live just like us. This statement reflects recognition of nature's subjecthood not just as an object for human interests.

The second theme is the development of ecological empathy manifested in students' ability to imagine and express non-human perspectives. In writing using tree perspectives which was an activity in the first unit, students showed the ability to adopt that perspective sensitively. One student wrote I stand here for decades, witnessing generations of humans come and go, providing oxygen without ever being thanked, but one day a big machine came and sawed my legs without guilt. This narrative shows not only imaginative capacity but also deep emotional engagement with the experience of other beings.

The third theme is appreciation of natural beauty as a gateway to ecological love. Many students in their reflections stated that nature observation experiences and descriptive writing made them aware of beauty they had not noticed before. One student stated I never really looked at the flowers in the school garden before but when asked to observe them carefully and write about them I was fascinated by the detail of their colors gradually changing from red to yellow and how bees interacted with them gently, now every time I pass them I smile seeing that beauty. This aesthetic experience creates an affective bond that becomes intrinsic motivation to protect nature.

The fourth theme is awareness of interdependence and sense of responsibility emerging from understanding that human well-being is inseparable from ecosystem health. Students expressed awareness that their daily actions such as plastic use or energy consumption have impacts on the broader environment. One student wrote I just realized that the plastic bottle I throw away does not really disappear but ends up in the ocean and can kill the turtles I like to see in documentaries, this makes me feel responsible to reduce plastic use. This awareness does not stop at the cognitive level but leads to commitment to change behavior.

The fifth theme is spiritual transformation where some students expressed experiences that can be categorized as spiritual encounters with nature. In the Balinese context with strong Hindu traditions, some students connected learning with the Tri Hita Karana concept and saw environmental conservation as part of cosmic harmony. One student wrote I realized that when we damage nature we not only damage the environment but also violate the balance taught by Tri Hita Karana our relationship with God with others and with nature must be harmonious. This reflection shows that the curriculum succeeded in activating local spiritual resources to deepen ecological awareness.

Classroom observations revealed that pedagogy of love was manifested in various concrete practices. Teachers showed modeling empathy through the way they spoke about nature with appreciative tones and genuine concern when discussing environmental issues. Learning began with emotional check-ins where students were invited to share their feelings about nature or environmental issues they cared about, creating emotional safety allowing students to be vulnerable in expressing their concerns. Class discussions were facilitated in ways encouraging multiple perspectives without judgment, where students felt safe to explore their values even if they contradicted dominant values.

Reflective writing practice was facilitated with gentle prompts encouraging students to explore their personal and emotional experiences with nature. Questions such as when was the last time you felt truly connected to nature, what makes you care about the environment, how do you feel when witnessing nature's destruction encouraged students toward deep introspection. Writing sharing was done in circles creating a sense of community where vulnerability was valued and personal stories honored.

Field trips to nature were not conducted with packed agendas but gave sufficient time for students to simply be with nature, sit under trees, listen to nature's sounds, or observe insects with full attention. Teachers gave invitations for mindfulness such as close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you how many different sounds can you identify which cultivated presence and awareness.

Interviews with teachers revealed that implementing this curriculum also had a transformative impact on themselves. Many teachers stated that this process made them reflect on their own relationship with nature and deepened their appreciation. One teacher stated teaching this curriculum made me myself more aware and more loving of nature I felt like learning together with students and this made teaching more authentic and meaningful. This teacher transformation is important because

pedagogy of love requires authenticity that cannot be faked, students can sense the genuineness of teachers' care for nature.

However, implementation also faced several challenges. Some teachers reported difficulty balancing ecotheology and love-based curriculum with national curriculum demands still heavily oriented toward technical language competency achievement. Time constraints also became an issue where meaningful learning required more time for reflection and discussion compared to conventional more transmissive learning. Some students also showed initial resistance to more reflective and emotional approaches because they were not accustomed to it, but this resistance generally decreased over time as they felt the benefits of more personal and meaningful learning.

In-depth analysis of student writings using the ecocriticism framework revealed transformation in language use. Before the curriculum, students' writing about nature tended to use factual and detached language with little imagery or emotion. After the curriculum, writing showed use of more figurative, metaphorical, and emotional language reflecting deeper connection. The use of personification to describe nature became more common indicating a tendency to see nature as a living subject not a dead object.

Furthermore, analysis showed that students' narratives about their relationship with nature shifted from narratives of exploitation or indifference to narratives of care and responsibility. Students began constructing their ecological identities reflected in statements such as I am part of nature not separate from it or I want to be someone who contributes to earth's health not damages it. This identity construction is important because it is the basis for sustainable ecological action.

This research's findings confirm theoretical arguments from ecotheologians and ecological educators that ecological awareness transformation requires more than information transmission but needs to involve spiritual and emotional dimensions. Integration of ecotheological principles in curriculum provides a meaning framework helping students understand ecological crisis not only as a technical problem but as a spiritual crisis demanding transformation of fundamental values and relationships with nature. Pedagogy of love creates an emotional container that is safe and supportive where this transformation can occur, where students can explore their feelings about nature without fear of judgment.

Bali's cultural context with rich spiritual traditions becomes an asset in implementing this curriculum. The Tri Hita Karana concept already familiar to students becomes a bridge facilitating them to integrate ecotheological principles in the spiritual framework they already have. This affirms the importance of contextualizing ecotheology in local traditions not imposing foreign frameworks.

Indonesian language learning proved to be a powerful medium for ecopedagogy because through language students not only learn about nature but learn new ways to relate and express relationships with nature. Creative writing became particularly effective as a tool for meaning-making and identity construction where students can explore and articulate their ecological experiences and values in personal and authentic ways.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research demonstrates that integration of ecotheology and pedagogy of love in Indonesian language learning can significantly cultivate students' ecological awareness encompassing not only knowledge about environmental issues but also emotional connection with nature, empathy toward other living beings, appreciation of natural beauty, and commitment to pro-environmental behavior. Large effect sizes across all ecological awareness dimensions indicate that approaches integrating spiritual and affective dimensions provide more substantial impact compared to conventional approaches focusing only on cognitive dimensions.

The transformation experienced by students includes paradigmatic shifts from anthropocentric to biocentric perspectives, development of stronger ecological identities, and construction of personal narratives showing sense of responsibility for environmental conservation. This transformation process was facilitated by pedagogy creating space for deep reflection, emotional expression, direct experiences with nature, and dialogue respecting multiple perspectives.

The developed curriculum offers a model that can be adapted in various Indonesian language learning contexts considering the uniqueness of local spiritual and cultural traditions. The conceptual

framework integrating ecotheological principles with elements of pedagogy of love can guide teachers in designing holistic learning that not only develops language competencies but also contributes to developing ecological awareness and character caring for earth's sustainability.

Implications for educational practice include first the importance of reorienting Indonesian language learning from narrow focus on technical skills to more holistic learning also cultivating value and character dimensions. Second, the need to provide broader space for personal reflection and emotional expression in learning often neglected in overly cognitive approaches. Third, the importance of modeling from teachers where pedagogy of love requires authenticity and genuine care that cannot be transmitted through methods alone but through teachers' being itself.

For national curriculum policy, these findings suggest the importance of integrating environmental education not only as an additional topic but as an integral dimension of all subjects including Indonesian language. An ecopedagogical framework integrating spiritual and emotional dimensions needs space in formal curricula given its effectiveness in cultivating deep and sustainable ecological awareness.

This research has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, implementation over one semester is relatively short to observe long-term impacts on students' pro-environmental behavior in their daily lives. Follow-up studies tracking students after several years will provide evidence of the sustainability of transformation that has occurred. Second, the specific research context in Bali with strong Hindu traditions may have unique characteristics facilitating ecotheology integration, so replication in different cultural and religious contexts needs to be done to test model transferability. Third, ecological awareness measurement still relying on self-report has limitations in capturing actual behavior, longitudinal observation of pro-environmental behavior will provide stronger validation.

For future research, several directions can be explored. First, comparative studies on the effectiveness of ecotheology-based curriculum versus more conventional environmental education approaches in cultivating ecological awareness and pro-environmental behavior will provide more robust evidence of value added from spiritual-affective approaches. Second, exploration of how ecotheology from various religious traditions can be integrated in inclusive and pluralistic curricula in Indonesia with high religious diversity. Third, research on factors facilitating or hindering ecotheology and love-based curriculum implementation in different school contexts will provide practical insights for scaling up. Fourth, deeper qualitative studies on students' spiritual experiences in engaging with nature can enrich understanding of transformative dimensions of ecopedagogy.

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