

VOICES FROM THE FIELD: CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

Teaching English, Greening Minds: Integrating Climate Action into TESOL through Service Learning

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Teaching Context

Location: University of Education Lahore, Multan Campus, Pakistan

Class size: 20-25 students

Class time: 120 mins, once a week

Students: Intermediate students (16-19 years old)

Students' goals: To improve their English proficiency and grow as responsible citizens

Problem

As the world faces escalating climate crises, teachers are increasingly called to integrate environmental sensitivity and sustainability into English Language Teaching (ELT). The U.S. Department of State's Access Scholarship Program ("Access" hereafter) promotes critical thinking through foreign language learning. Access classrooms provide underprivileged youth with valuable opportunities to improve their English; however, until recently, they often remained disconnected from urgent global issues like climate change. Learners may acquire grammar and vocabulary, but they seldom use English in meaningful, real-world contexts. This disconnect is concerning, particularly as many students live in communities directly affected by floods, heatwaves, and pollution.

At the same time, teachers often feel unprepared to integrate climate themes into language teaching due to the lack of the training, resources, and institutional support to do so effectively (Huang, 2024). In addition, language barriers persist, as much of the climate discourse is produced in English, leaving local learners with limited access to accessible and culturally relevant materials (Zahra, 2023). Finally, curriculum constraints make it difficult to connect English learning with climate action since environmental topics are usually treated as add-ons rather than integral parts of lessons (Khan, 2022). As a result, English language teaching risks becoming an isolated activity, while the opportunity to empower youth as both confident communicators and active environmental citizens is lost.

Solution

To address these gaps, English Access classrooms can serve as hubs for integrating climate action with language learning. Since many of the students live in communities directly affected by climate change,



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it makes sense to link language learning with climate action. Instead of treating environmental themes as an add-on, teachers can embed them into everyday TESOL practices, making English a tool for both communication and community service.

The project below was designed and implemented with Access students in Pakistan. The goal is to integrate language learning with problem-solving skills development. In doing so, I aim to bridge the language classroom and the local community and place my students at the center of the actions.

Project Design

Phase 1: Preflection

1. Research and Awareness

At the very first stage, I introduce the concept of *Design Thinking* (Simon, 1969), so that students explore and understand climate-related issues within their own communities. I guide them to read simple articles, watch short videos, or listen to podcasts about environmental challenges, and conduct user interviews (See Appendix A). This phase helps learners to identify real-world problems such as waste management, water scarcity, excessive use of plastic, and insufficient green lands. They also learn English vocabulary related to climate action and engage in short reflective discussions (Brown, 2009). Their discussions serve as a foundation for the further steps in the project.

Next, the students work in groups to reframe the problem in a human-centered way based on the collected insights. They then generate a wide range of creative ideas and solutions sharing their viewpoints. Using task-based techniques, students summarize what they have learned in English, share new vocabulary, and reflect on how these issues connect to their daily lives (Ellis, 2020). This stage helps students develop not only environmental awareness but also critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, which are core components of 21st century learning. Also, through discussions, note-taking, and summarizing activities, students practice target vocabulary, grammatical structures, and presentation skills while expressing their understanding of climate issues.

In the subsequent stage, all feasible ideas are gathered and analyzed to determine whether to refine or to finalize. This Design Thinking Method (DTM) not only builds language skills but also creates a strong knowledge base for project work.

2. Brainstorming Local Challenges

After developing awareness, students engage in collaborative brainstorming sessions to identify the most pressing local challenges, such as water shortages, pollution, or waste management. Teachers can use interactive methods like mind-mapping, group discussions, role-plays, and poster presentations, which give students the confidence to express ideas in English while developing critical thinking (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). Once learners analyze problems affecting their own communities, they become more motivated to communicate and propose creative solutions.

One of my favorite activities is to ask students to make their own 'Dictionaries' and 'Acrostic Poems' titled *My Piece of Literature*, listing environment related words according to ecological problems and themes. Another engaging activity is making 'Pictionaries,' which build both critical thinking and creativity. This stage ensures that projects grow out of learners' own realities, making them more meaningful and motivating.

3. Solution Planning Workshops

Finally, I conduct hands-on sessions where students work in different learning stations to plan possible solutions. These workshops may include designing posters, drafting campaign slogans, practicing

speeches, or even simulating a community meeting. Here, project-based learning and service-learning pedagogy are central since they connect classroom English to real-world application (Dutta, K. 2024). By the end of this phase, students not only practice language but also prepare to take the first steps toward climate action in their communities.

4. Concluding Reflections

Through community service projects such as tree planting, recycling drives, or awareness campaigns, students get the chance to practice English while doing something meaningful.

The service-learning actions are completed over a four-week cycle, where students plan, carry out, and reflect on their community tasks.

- In the first week, they conduct brief surveys with students and teachers, using simple English interview questions about topics such as plastic waste, lack of greenery, and littering.
- During the second week, students prepare learning resources like dictionaries of environmental words, acrostic poems, infographic posters, and Pictionary.
- The third week focuses on hands-on-action. The students recycle plastic cans, plant small plants, decorate school corridors with English climate-awareness messages, and record short vlogs explaining their activities in [English](#). At the same time, they practice environment-themed coding tasks based on environmental vocabulary, as coding activities enhance problem-solving, creativity and language development (Bers, 2018)
- The students conduct a mini-workshop for their peers, lead them to the campus corridors and organize learning stations with themes such as Water Drive, Tree Planting, and Litter-Free Campus. The groups carry out a Vocabulary Hunt activity, which helps them to find the meanings of the environment-related words and idioms.
- In the final week, students organize a presentation competition in English presenting their projects. Each group showcases their learning and contributions using Canva or Powerpoint, demonstrating both language development and meaningful social impact.

Extension: Students may write posters, prepare short speeches, or share stories about how to save water and reduce waste. In this way, English becomes more than a school subject; it becomes a tool for real-life change (See Appendix C), where Access students demonstrate their commitment to becoming responsible members of society.

Discussion

In the project above, the classroom turns into a space where learning connects with life and where students not only gain confidence in English but also discover their power to make a difference for their communities and for the planet.

The main purpose of this article is to encourage other ELTs to incorporate ecolinguistics into their teaching. Through such practices, educators have the chance to inspire a generation that communicates with compassion, acts with purpose, and believes that even the smallest action can make a difference.

As an Access teacher, my motivation to integrate an environmental theme into my lesson plans became a strong personal drive. My journey began when I presented at the 4th English Language Expo in Hyderabad, where I conducted a workshop titled “Climate Action in Language Education: Activities for Low-Resource Classrooms.” This experience became the foundation of my engagement with the theme. Building on that, my current research explores “Integrating Climate Action in English

Language Teaching: A Qualitative Study of Access Teachers' Preparedness and Perspectives." Through this study, I intend to explore how English teachers perceive their role in promoting environmental awareness and how prepared they feel to transfer those values into classroom practices. By listening to teachers' voices and classroom experiences, I hope to highlight both the challenges and the possibilities of connecting language learning with climate education. I believe that addressing such pressing issues on platforms like TESOL not only benefits educators by equipping them with practical strategies but also encourages institutions and administrations to take meaningful and measurable steps toward sustainability in education.

Looking to the future, the focus should be on capacity-building for teachers and curricular integration. Teachers can be equipped with training and resources to design lessons that merge sustainability themes with language outcomes (Huang, 2024). Similarly, climate education should be embedded within TESOL curricula, rather than treated as an optional theme, so that learners consistently practice English while addressing issues of global and local concern (UNESCO, 2021).

In addition to the ideas presented in this paper, some other solutions may include:

- Project-based learning, where students carry out activities like tree plantation drives, recycling campaigns, or clean-water awareness sessions, and then present their reflections through class presentations. (Dutta, 2024). (See Appendix B)
- Service-learning models, where English lessons are directly linked with community service activities, bridging classroom learning and civic engagement (Bringle & Clayton, 2022).
- Task-based language teaching, in which learners prepare posters, role-plays, or debates on climate issues, ensuring that real-life content drives language use (Ellis, 2020).

By combining pedagogical innovation with long-term institutional support, English classrooms can transform into spaces where learners not only build linguistic competence but also develop as environmentally responsible citizens prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

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Appendix A

Interactive Student Interview Questions

1. What are some environmental problems you notice in your community (e.g., waste, water, trees, air pollution)?
2. How do these problems affect your daily life or your family's life?
3. Have you ever talked about climate change or environmental issues in your English class before? If yes, how did you feel about it?
4. Which environmental problem do you think is the biggest challenge in your community? Why?
5. How do you think English can help you or your classmates talk about or solve this problem?
6. If you could design a classroom activity to learn English and also help the environment, what would it look like?
7. Can you think of fun projects (like plays, posters, debates, videos, or games) that could help people learn about climate issues in English?
8. What new words or phrases in English have you learned that help you talk about the environment?
9. Imagine your class is asked to make a small project for the community, what project would you choose?
10. How would you use English in this project (e.g., writing slogans, giving speeches, making posters, or social media campaigns)?
11. How would you know if your project made a difference in your community?
12. What did you enjoy most when learning about the environment in your English class?
13. How do you think Access students like you can help your community become eco-friendlier?
14. If you could send a message to other young people about climate action, what would you say in English?

Appendix B

Poster Making Rubric / Scoring Sheet

This rubric is designed to evaluate posters based on relevance, creativity, language use, neatness, and visual impact. Each category is scored from 1 (Needs Improvement) to 4 (Excellent).

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Relevance to Theme	Strongly reflects the theme; message is clear and powerful	Mostly reflects the theme; message is clear	Somewhat related to theme; message is unclear	Little or no connection to theme
Creativity & Originality	Very original ideas; highly creative use of visuals and slogans	Some originality; creative effort shown	Limited originality; relies on common ideas	No originality; copied or lacks creativity
Language (English Use)	Slogans/phrases in English are accurate, catchy, and impactful	Mostly accurate English; some catchy slogans	Basic English used; some errors affect clarity	Major errors in English; message unclear
Clarity & Neatness	Neat, well-organized, easy to read from distance	Generally neat and readable	Some parts untidy; readability affected	Very untidy; hard to read
Visual Impact	Excellent use of color, balance, and visuals; very eye-catching	Good use of visuals and colors; appealing	Average visuals; lacks balance	Weak visuals; dull or overcrowded

Total Score: ____ / 20

Teacher Comments: _____

Student Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Classroom Tour: Evidences





Appendix C

Project Photos

The students at the University of Education, Multan presented their ideas through informative and visually engaging posters. These students worked in groups, conducted interviews and presented their posters to spread the word to achieve sustainable goals. Featured below are the students who participated in the Climate Action Poster Making Competition on Diverse Environmental themes, focusing on Environmental Safe Guard Leaders' Vision and Mission. The posters not only reflected their critical thinking but also showcased their commitment to raising awareness and promoting solutions for a sustainable future.



English Access Scholarship Students, Group 3 (Photo by Amra Shafiq).

<h3 style="text-align: center;">INTRODUCTION</h3>  <p>My Name is Muhammad Hassan I'm From Multan. My Father name is Muhammad Yaseen. I'm doing Bs English from this University. Meanwhile, I'm Also the part of Access Program . Through Access Program I have become more Confident in Communication.</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">COMMUNITY SERVICE</h3> <p>I believe in "Translate ideas, not words" — Helping my classmates speak English confidently by thinking freely. As the voice of the students, I share their problems and build a supportive, clean learning space for Everyone. I inspire others with "Don't let language limit your world" — Showing that good communication breaks Barriers. Together, we build a better, community — "Make the choice today to help others in need!"</p>  <p>TRANSLATING THOUGHTS, NOT WORDS Instead of Translating word-for-word from Urdu, focus on expressing my thoughts in English. This makes speech more natural and fluid</p>
<h3 style="text-align: center;">LEADERSHIP</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ I lead with courage and honesty. ✔ I listen and include everyone's ideas. ✔ I solve problems calmly and wisely. ✔ I inspire my team to do their best. ✔ I set a good example for others to follow. ✔ I stand up for what is right and fair. <p>"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." John C. Maxwell "Great leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders."</p> 	<h3 style="text-align: center;">WHY ME ?</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ I always stand up for my classmates and help them feel heard. ✔ I turn problems into solutions with a calm and positive mind. ✔ I encourage teamwork and make sure no one is left behind. ✔ I set an example by being honest, responsible, and respectful. ✔ I am confident and never afraid to take responsibility. ✔ I inspire others to dream bigger and do better. <p>"A leader is one who serves others first." "Be the Change you wish to see in the world."</p> 

Poster example (Photo by Amra Shafiq).



Students with their posters (Photo by Amra Shafiq).

