

Aligning ELT with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals: An Ecolinguistic Analysis of Coursebooks and Teacher Practices

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Abstract

The present study explored the representation of themes related to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13: Climate Action) in a series of global English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. To this end, sustainability narratives in these coursebook series were analyzed, along with how language teachers interpret and adapt them. Data were collected through content analysis of the coursebooks, semi-structured interviews with ten Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, and narrative inquiry forms. The findings reveal an uneven and fragmented treatment of environmental sustainability across the coursebooks. While World English and, to a lesser extent, Ready For B2 include episodic counter-narratives of care and resilience, American English File predominantly foregrounds consumerist discourses, and Evolve largely overlooks ecological themes despite offering strong pedagogical affordances. Teachers frequently attempted to mediate these gaps by re-storying tasks and introducing sustainability-related discussions. However, their efforts were constrained by curricular demands, exam-oriented instruction, and institutional expectations. The study demonstrates that sustainability in ELT remains peripheral rather than systematically integrated. The findings highlight the need for coursebook developers, policymakers, and teacher education programs to embed sustainability structurally within ELT materials and practices, thereby supporting the development of climate literacy beyond individual teacher practices.

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Introduction

The 2020s began with apocalyptic bushfires across Australia that were unprecedented and harbored the sense that the future had arrived in terms of climate change and environmental challenges (Newman, 2020). The impacts of these challenges were varied and diverse, substantially affecting ecosystems and societies worldwide. Undoubtedly, cities are the main victims of such changes in the ecosystems, as their dense populations and infrastructure make them especially vulnerable to flagrant environmental changes (van der Heijden, 2019). According to the World Bank, it is estimated that by 2050, approximately 200 million people will be displaced due to climate changes (Clement et al., 2021). To address the issue, various global organizations have recently attempted to foster global awareness among individuals so as to protect the climate (Nadeau et al., 2022).

In educational contexts, this global call for awareness extends to language education, where instructional materials play a significant role in shaping learners' perspectives on global challenges. Specifically, as primary instructional tools in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, coursebooks hold considerable potential to introduce ecological themes, promote critical reflection, and support learners in developing a deeper understanding of sustainability and climate action (Kazazoglu, 2025). Accordingly, English language teaching (ELT) materials can critically shape attitudes, ideologies, identities, and actions that may contribute to ecological degradation and climate crisis. In this regard, it is essential for ELT researchers and practitioners to develop, evaluate, and implement pedagogical practices that promote ecological sustainability and well-being (Micalay-Hurtado & Poole, 2022). Indeed, both coursebooks and teachers' classroom practices play a significant role in fostering sustainability-oriented perspectives. Given that curriculum content and instructional practices are strongly influenced by coursebooks (Solhi et al., 2021; Tomlinson, 2023), learners' understandings and perceptions of issues such as environmental sustainability are more likely to be shaped through these materials (Brown, 2024; João et al., 2022). Similarly, the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers can substantially affect how learners negotiate, communicate, and comprehend principles of sustainability (Blöse, 2025). Owing to its potential to cultivate environmentally responsible behaviors and support sustainable development, the integration of sustainability into education has been identified as a critical priority (United Nations, 2015). Consequently, the role of education has become increasingly central in shaping learners' knowledge and understanding of sustainability-related issues (UNESCO, 2023).

Language education and coursebooks have increasingly attempted to incorporate environmentally related sustainability principles into their content in recent years (Liu et al., 2024). Indeed, coursebooks are key pedagogical tools that shape language learners' understanding of sustainability challenges. The significant role that instructional practices and coursebooks play in fostering environmentally responsible behavior is underscored in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which call for the integration of sustainability themes into ELT materials (Ibrahim & Damayanti, 2024). Within EFL contexts, coursebooks play a particularly important role as they define the scope and sequence of language learning (Solhi et al., 2020) and also function as cultural and ideological resources through which embedded values and perspectives are conveyed. Moreover, EFL textbooks not only address language-related skills but also engage with contemporary social and environmental concerns, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, resource depletion, and environmental justice (Al Karasneh et al., 2025; Ibrahim & Damayanti, 2024).

The SDGs were established by the United Nations in 2015 and call for immediate action to ensure sustainable consumption and production across societies worldwide (UNESCO, 2023). More specifically, SDG 4.7 emphasizes that by 2030, learners should acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development. This includes competencies related to sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2023). In addition, SDG 13 calls for urgent action to address climate change and its impacts by raising awareness across societies and educational contexts. To operationalize these goals, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023) strongly advocates for the integration of sustainability principles across all subjects and educational levels. Consequently, foreign language classrooms are increasingly recognized as valuable spaces for fostering environmental awareness and intercultural engagement (UNESCO, 2023).

Taken together, coursebooks constitute primary pedagogical materials that, together with teachers' instructional approaches, play a significant role in shaping learners' understanding of environmental sustainability (Mohammadnia & Moghadam, 2019). However, despite widespread recognition of the need to integrate environmental sustainability into education, there remains a notable lack of research critically examining the extent to which global EFL coursebooks and teachers' pedagogical practices align with the SDGs. This gap is particularly evident in relation to pressing global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. Addressing this research gap, the present study examines the extent to which global EFL coursebooks incorporate elements of environmental sustainability and explores how teachers perceive and respond to such content in their instructional practices. To this end, this study combines textbook analysis with teacher interviews and

digital diaries to examine both pedagogical resources and teachers' real-life experiences at the intersection of language education and sustainability.

Literature Review

Sustainability in ELT

Sustainability has emerged as a central global imperative within the United Nations' SDGs. In the field of ELT, researchers have increasingly examined how language education can contribute to sustainability by fostering learners' awareness of environmental issues (Goulah, 2015). Nevertheless, research remains limited in examining how sustainability is actually represented in teaching materials and enacted in everyday classroom practices. From an ecolinguistic perspective, this represents a significant omission, given that textbook discourses have the potential to shape how learners understand the relationship between humans and the natural world. When such discourses normalize unsustainable practices or render ecological concerns invisible, learners' opportunities to develop ecological awareness through language education become constrained. At the same time, an ecolinguistic perspective offers a valuable lens for examining sustainability in ELT by foregrounding the analysis of how environmental issues are represented in language learning materials.

ELT has been positioned as a potential site for fostering global awareness and ethical responsibility. Previous research has highlighted the important role of language education in promoting global awareness and ethical responsibility (Gray, 2013; McGrath, 2012). According to Gray (2013), coursebooks embed implicit assumptions about human-environment relationships and patterns of consumption, indicating that they carry ideological messages rather than functioning as neutral pedagogical tools. Similarly, McGrath (2012) argues that even tasks that appear pedagogically neutral may reproduce dominant societal narratives, including those related to ecological issues. In a similar vein, Vilches (2009) asserts that educational materials are shaped by broader social and educational priorities, which tend to privilege language acquisition and marketable skills over ethical and ecological literacy.

Sustainability has increasingly been integrated into language education over recent decades (Kazazoglu, 2025). Recent studies indicate that sustainability-oriented goals and objectives can be embedded within ELT curricula, instructional materials, classroom practices, and teacher education programs (Yu et al., 2024). Such integration underscores the constructive role of language learning in shaping learners' worldviews (Kapranov, 2022). Moreover, linguistic choices and discursive patterns can either promote or undermine ecological awareness (Mercer et al., 2022), highlighting the close relationship between sustainability and ecolinguistics. However, despite this growing body of research, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on teachers' perceptions or pedagogical principles. Consequently, there remains a need for studies that examine

how sustainability is linguistically constructed within ELT resources, and particularly in coursebooks.

Coursebooks and Sustainability

Coursebooks have long played a crucial role in language learning (Tomlinson, 2023). However, their treatment of sustainability-related themes has been inconsistent and, in many cases, remains superficial (Goulah, 2015). In most instances, such efforts are limited to isolated classroom activities addressing topics such as recycling or pollution, rather than being embedded within contextualized narratives that meaningfully support language development. Ecolinguistics enables analysis beyond these surface-level treatments by foregrounding what Stibbe (2021) terms “the stories we live by,” that is, the underlying narratives, frames, and metaphors through which learners’ worldviews are constructed. Within ELT materials, for example, sustainability may be framed primarily as an individual lifestyle choice rather than a systemic or collective concern, while environmental problems may be portrayed as distant rather than urgent. Similarly, ecological issues are sometimes represented as localized or exceptional events (e.g., nuclear tests or polluted lakes), implicitly minimizing their relevance to broader and interconnected ecological systems. Taken together, by adopting an ecolinguistic perspective, the present study investigates how such discourses are manifested in EFL coursebooks and considers the implications they hold for learners’ ecological orientations.

ELT coursebooks have widely been regarded as powerful mediators of pedagogy and ideology (Mishan, 2021). Although the explicit integration of sustainability into ELT is relatively recent, early studies had already recognized the potential of language education to raise environmental awareness (Jacobs & Goatly, 2000; Stibbe, 2021). Even prior to the introduction of the SDGs, coursebooks included ecological topics such as recycling and climate change. However, these topics were often treated in a fragmented and peripheral manner (Jacobs & Goatly, 2000). More recent research on ELT coursebooks suggests that ecological awareness and sustainability are frequently addressed through isolated activities or stand-alone topics (Mohammadnia & Moghadam, 2019). Drawing on an ecolinguistic perspective, recent studies have identified underlying assumptions such as consumerist ideologies, which conflict with sustainability goals (Liu et al., 2024). However, existing research has tended to focus primarily on textual analysis and has rarely connected ecolinguistic analyses of coursebooks with teachers’ perceptions and classroom practices.

Teachers’ Role and Agency

Teachers play a crucial role in negotiating and recontextualizing coursebook discourses and content (Harmer, 2015). Previous research indicates that although teachers often perceive limitations in their instructional resources, they frequently exercise agency by appropriating or resisting texts in ways that align with their pedagogical beliefs and

ideals (Gray, 2010). Ecolinguistic analysis foregrounds this agency by examining how teachers interpret, negotiate, and work with sustainability-related discourses in coursebooks. In doing so, teachers may either reproduce unsustainable discourses or challenge them by introducing alternative narratives that support ecologically responsible ways of living. Understanding teachers' interpretations is therefore essential for linking discursive analyses of materials with classroom practice. Nevertheless, as aforementioned, few studies have provided in-depth accounts that connect ecolinguistic analyses of coursebooks with teachers' perspectives on sustainability. Addressing this gap requires closer examination of the complex ways in which ecolinguistic discourses embedded in coursebooks intersect with the realities of classroom teaching practices.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, Crookes (2013) argues that teachers' agency entails an ethical responsibility that enables them to challenge inequitable discourses, thereby reshaping how language and its representations are constructed. These understandings have been further reinforced by recent theoretical work. For instance, teacher agency has been conceptualized as an ecological achievement shaped by the temporal trajectories of teachers' professional lives and the instructional cultures in which they operate. However, Tao and Gao (2017) emphasize that teacher agency is dynamic and may fluctuate in response to social and policy pressures in multilingual educational settings. Moreover, post-pandemic research suggests that teachers' agentic roles have prompted a paradigm shift in pedagogical decision-making, with greater emphasis on decisions aligned with learners' needs rather than prioritizing top-down directives (Ashton, 2022).

Taken together, although the existing literature reflects a growing recognition of sustainability in ELT, there remains a lack of research offering a coherent analytical framework that links coursebook texts with classroom practices. Ecolinguistics provides such a framework by enabling the present study to (1) analyze sustainability-related discourses in global EFL coursebooks, (2) examine how teachers interpret and enact these discourses in classroom contexts, and (3) contribute to the development of critical eco-pedagogy in ELT by foregrounding language as a central site of ecological representation and transformation. This theoretical lens allows the study to address an important gap in literature while also highlighting the potential role of ELT in responding to contemporary ecological challenges.

Theoretical Foundations

Ecolinguistic theory, which examines the relationship between language and its influence on human interactions with the natural world, provides the theoretical foundation for the present study. Specifically, the study adopts an ecolinguistic lens to investigate how language contributes to the contemporary global ecological crisis (Stibbe, 2021). In this context, ecolinguistics is employed to conduct a critical analysis of sustainability-related discourses in EFL coursebooks and to examine how these discourses are taken up and

represented in teachers' classroom practices. This theoretical framework also facilitates the exploration of the emotional implications of integrating sustainability-oriented content into EFL teachers' pedagogical practices. As such, ecolinguistics is particularly well suited to the present study, as it enables a systematic connection between the textual analysis of instructional materials and teachers' genuine practices.

While related approaches such as critical eco-pedagogy (Freire, 1978; Gadotti, 2008) and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015) emphasize education's transformative potential and the importance of multiple forms of literacy in addressing global challenges, ecolinguistics serves as the unifying framework for this study by positioning language as the central site of inquiry. Accordingly, critical eco-pedagogy and multiliteracies inform the broader conceptual orientation of the research, whereas ecolinguistics provides the primary analytical and interpretive framework. In this way, the study contributes to the growing body of ELT research applying ecolinguistics, highlighting how sustainability is represented in teaching materials and how teachers engage with these representations in relation to SDG 13.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the representation of environmental sustainability in four widely used EFL coursebooks: American English File, World English, Ready For B2, and Evolve. In addition, it investigates how EFL teachers engage with these representations in their classroom practices. To examine both the textual and experiential dimensions of sustainability in ELT, the study employs content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and narrative inquiry. This methodological approach aligns with the study's theoretical framework by enabling systematic analysis of both instructional materials and classroom practices. The selected global coursebooks were drawn from commonly available options and were included because they represent some of the most widely used ELT coursebooks in the national context.

Participants and Sampling

Ten Iranian EFL teachers participated in this study. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers who had experience teaching all the coursebooks examined in the study. This sampling strategy ensured that participants were able to provide informed and in-depth insights into both the content and pedagogical representations of the materials. The participants varied in terms of teaching experience and educational background (see Table 1).

Table 1*Participants' Demographic Information*

Participants	Gender	Teaching Experience (Years)	Educational Background
T1	F	5	BA in English
T2	M	7	BA in TEFL
T3	F	6	MA in Applied Linguistics
T4	M	8	BA in English
T5	F	5	MA in TEFL
T6	M	9	BA in English
T7	F	6	BA in TEFL
T8	M	7	MA in Applied Linguistics
T9	F	5	BA in English
T10	M	8	BA in TEFL

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data were ensured. To protect participants' privacy, identifying information was omitted or coded during data handling and reporting. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study before the semi-structured interviews and were made aware of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection

As aforementioned, data were collected through coursebook analysis, semi-structured interviews, and narrative inquiry to enable methodological triangulation. This approach aimed to examine the representation of sustainability in EFL materials as well as the genuine experiences of teachers who engaged with these materials in their teaching practices.

Coursebook Analysis

American English File, World English Series, Ready For B2, and Evolve were selected for analysis. These coursebooks were identified as widely used global EFL materials in the national context. In a systematic manner, texts, exercises, visual elements, and activities related to principles of environmental sustainability were examined. Sustainability themes—including references to climate change, social responsibility, biodiversity, resource management, and cultural perspectives on the environment—were analyzed in depth to identify both explicit and implicit messages. During this process, researchers documented recurring patterns, metaphors, and narrative structures through initial notes, which informed subsequent coding and thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted independently by all researchers, with each examining the coursebooks using the same analytical framework. Following their individual analyses, the researchers met to compare findings and resolve discrepancies, ultimately reaching consensus to ensure the validity and consistency of the analysis.

Interviews

The teachers participated in online interviews lasting between 20 and 25 minutes. Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed in depth to explore how EFL teachers perceive, engage with, and adapt sustainability-related content in their pedagogical practices. The interview questions were developed based on ecolinguistic theory and the principles of SDG 13 and were reviewed by two experts to ensure clarity, content validity, and alignment with the study's theoretical framework. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent thematic analysis.

Narrative Inquiries

The participants were also instructed to complete narrative inquiry tasks, which enabled them to reflect on their experiences and classroom practices related to sustainability-oriented content. These narratives were framed in accordance with the principles of SDG 13 and ecolinguistics and were designed to prompt teachers to describe the challenges they encounter as well as their personal insights into how sustainability is represented in their pedagogical practices. The narrative inquiries complemented the semi-structured interviews and coursebook analysis, thereby supporting methodological triangulation. The data collection process lasted three months and began with coursebook analysis to identify content related to environmental sustainability. This was followed by the administration of semi-structured interviews, after which the recordings were transcribed. Finally, teachers were given two weeks to complete and submit the narrative inquiries, allowing sufficient time for reflection on their teaching experiences.

Data Analysis

The selected coursebooks were analyzed in alignment with ecolinguistic theory (see Stibbe, 2021). This theoretical foundation enabled the researchers to focus specifically on how environmental sustainability and human-nature relationships are represented through language. In addition, the analysis was guided by the principles outlined in SDG 13. First, each coursebook was examined systematically to identify passages, exercises, images, and activities related to sustainability. Both explicit and implicit representations of sustainability were captured through open coding, including metaphors, narrative frames, presuppositions, and omissions. For example, texts that portrayed climate change as a distant problem affecting "other countries" were coded as employing a *distancing narrative*. These initial codes were then grouped into higher-order categories representing broader discursive patterns, such as *human-nature relationships*, *responsibility framing*, and *consumerist ideology*. Finally, overarching themes were generated from these categories to capture how each coursebook represents environmental sustainability and how these representations align with global sustainability objectives.

The interview and narrative inquiry data were analyzed using thematic analysis informed by ecolinguistic theory. Interview transcripts and written narratives were reviewed

repeatedly to develop a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences and reflections. The data were coded to identify salient units related to teachers' engagement with, adaptation of, and interpretation of sustainability in their pedagogical practices. During the coding process, both explicit statements and underlying perspectives were considered. The resulting codes were organized into categories representing recurrent patterns across participants. For example, codes such as *modifying activities, using local examples, and project-based adaptations* were grouped under the category *teacher adaptation strategies*. Subsequently, these categories were examined in greater depth to generate overarching themes that reflected both the ecolinguistic discourses identified in the coursebooks and teachers' classroom practices. Themes such as *Alignment with Personal and Professional Values, Perceived Barriers and Constraints, and Critical Engagement with Sustainability* emerged from this process. To ensure analytic rigor, the themes were reviewed against the original data, the findings from the coursebook analysis, and the SDG framework. In addition, the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings were enhanced through peer review and selective member checking (see Birt et al., 2016).

Finally, data triangulation was employed to examine how sustainability-related textual content is reflected in EFL teachers' classroom practices. This analysis enabled the researchers to identify instances in which teachers reinforced, adapted, or resisted the narratives and framings embedded in the coursebooks. Through this process, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of environmental sustainability within EFL contexts. By linking textual analysis with teachers' lived experiences, the study highlights the value of an ecolinguistic perspective in revealing how environmental sustainability is represented in EFL materials and how pedagogical agency is enacted in classroom practice.

Findings

By examining four global EFL coursebooks and drawing on data from interviews and narrative inquiries, the study reveals a complex and uneven representation of environmental sustainability and ecological themes in teaching materials. The findings are organized thematically across four key areas. First, the study examines the presence or absence of ecological content in the coursebooks. Second, it explores the dominance of consumerist narratives in relation to alternative counter-stories. Third, it addresses the role of teachers in mediating and recontextualizing these texts in classroom practice. Finally, it compares the extent to which the coursebook series align with the principles of Sustainable Development Goal 13.

Explicit Ecological Content in Coursebooks

With regard to explicit coverage, Ready For B2 offers the clearest focus on environmental themes. The "World Days" unit promotes positive actions such as car-free days and energy-saving practices at home, explicitly linking individual habits to ecological

responsibility. The unit emphasizes that protecting the planet is not solely the responsibility of governments but a shared obligation requiring everyday action. In this respect, such reading passages both raise awareness and invite learners to conceptualize climate action as a collective responsibility. For instance, the statement “We must all contribute to our daily lives” raises awareness and prompts reflection on collective engagement. In addition, tasks such as the essay prompt “There is little that individuals can do to help the environment. Do you agree?” extend this engagement by encouraging learners to interrogate the relationship between individual action and systemic responsibility. According to the participating teachers, these activities constitute productive moments of ecological reflection in the classroom. As one teacher noted, “*students debated whether recycling really matters if industries keep polluting. It was the first time I saw them questioning systems, not just themselves.*” Such inclusions are closely aligned with the principles of SDG 13.3 (education and awareness) and SDG 13.2 (policy integration).

Nevertheless, despite this alignment, these instances remain limited and isolated. Given the exam-oriented nature of Ready For B2, sustainability appears only briefly rather than as an integrated thematic strand. The teachers emphasized this fragmentation, observing that after sustainability-focused discussions and activities, “*the materials return to consumerism culture and advertising, and the green thread disappears.*” From an ecolinguistic perspective, Ready For B2 illustrates how counter-stories of shared ecological responsibility can emerge within coursebook content yet remain marginal in relation to the dominant discourse of exam preparation.

The analysis of the Evolve series revealed a distinctly different pattern. Across its six levels, ecological content is not explicitly rejected. Rather, it is largely absent or overlooked. Lower-level units frequently address topics such as weather, food, transport, and community life—domains that are rich in ecological implications—yet these are consistently framed as neutral lifestyle topics. For instance, a survey task in Evolve 2 asks learners to record how their classmates commute but provides no opportunity to engage with issues of sustainability or urban planning. The teachers explicitly noted these missed opportunities to connect everyday topics with broader environmental concerns. For example, one of the respondents stated that “*the transport survey was a perfect setup for a climate discussion. However, the book kept it at ‘I go by bus’ versus ‘I go by car.’ Without mediation, the climate dimension disappears.*” At higher levels, Evolve 4 to 6 introduce problem-solving tasks and debates on global challenges, but the chosen topics typically revolve around technology or consumer culture rather than climate. Seven teachers responded by adapting and reframing the materials to incorporate sustainability-oriented perspectives. As one explained, “*we used the debate structure in Evolve 5 but changed the motion to ‘Governments should ban private cars in cities by 2030.’ The scaffold was there, but the climate content came from me.*” Such practices highlight the gap between the strong communicative affordances of the series and its weak ecological

content. From an ecolinguistic perspective, potential climate-related framing remains largely unaddressed. When examined through the lens of the SDG, the series offers some support for SDG 13.3 through its task design. However, it fails to engage with SDG 13.2, while its treatment of SDG 13.1 (resilience) remains minimal, appearing only in a limited number of weather-related texts.

Consumerist Storylines and Emerging Counter-Stories

Whereas Ready For B2 was found to offer fragmented counter-stories and the Evolve series demonstrates a general absence of ecological content, American English File consistently foregrounds consumer-oriented themes. Across its five levels, the coursebook positions learners primarily as shoppers, diners, travelers, and users of consumer goods. Lots of units focus on shopping habits, food preferences, and tourism experiences, often presented in an uplifting tone that celebrates consumption. A clear example appears in American English File 2, where learners are asked to discuss their favorite shops and recent purchases without any reference to sustainability or waste.

Teachers expressed concern about this orientation. As one teacher noted, *“students learn how to buy, but not how to care. There’s no reference to any environmental factors such as recycling, emissions.”* Even at advanced proficiency levels, thematic content remains centered on advertising and international brands rather than addressing environmental issues such as climate policy or renewable energy. From an ecolinguistic perspective, the American English File series reproduces a dominant consumerist narrative by normalizing unsustainable practices. In terms of alignment with SDG 13, the series provides little relevant content in association with SDG 13.3, SDG 13.2 is not addressed, and SDG 13.1 receives no consideration.

In contrast to the other coursebooks, the World English series incorporates ecological themes extensively by drawing on National Geographic materials. Even at the Intro level, the series exposes learners to concepts such as farmers whose livelihoods depend on harsh climatic conditions and stories of children rescuing puffins. Such texts foreground narratives of care and resilience, offering a strong counterpoint to consumerist discourses. In World English 1, a unit on solar cooking introduces renewable energy, while another addresses habitat destruction. Both units explicitly invite learners to propose preventive solutions. Similarly, World English 2 includes debates on the environmental impact of tourism and predictive tasks about future cities that encourage learners to envision sustainable transport and cleaner forms of living. World English 3 extends this focus further by incorporating readings on hurricanes, glaciers, and sea-level rise, alongside texts addressing elephant and forest conservation. Teachers responded positively to this orientation. As one teacher explained, *“with World English, the climate content is there in the texts and videos. My job is to extend it, not invent it.”* From an ecolinguistic perspective, the series consistently foregrounds non-human agency such as forests, storms, and glaciers, allowing ecological processes to function as grammatical agents. Although systemic actors such as governments and corporations remain largely

absent, limiting alignment with SDG 13.2, the series demonstrates strong alignment with SDG 13.3 and moderate alignment with SDG 13.1.

When the series are examined collectively, clear contrasts among the coursebooks become evident. Specifically, Ready For B2 offers explicit but episodic counter-stories; Evolve provides considerable pedagogical affordances but largely omits climate-related content; the American English File series entrenches consumerist narratives with minimal ecological presence; and the World English series embeds ecological entry points and alternative narratives of care, albeit with limited attention to systemic or policy-level perspectives. Teachers' reflections triangulated these findings. As one teacher observed, "*In World English, students see puffins being rescued and glaciers melting. The difference is night and day.*" Such testimony underscores that materials not only include or exclude ecological narratives but also shape teachers' pedagogical roles in distinct ways, positioning them either as resisters who must re-story consumerist texts or as facilitators who can build upon ecological content already embedded in the materials.

Teacher Practices as Resistance and Re-storying

Teachers' accounts revealed how teacher practices functioned as a form of resistance to erasure and consumerist discourse. Most teachers reported adapting units focused on shopping, travel, or advertising in order to foreground sustainability-related issues. One teacher described transforming a consumer-oriented task into a sustainability-focused activity, explaining: "*Instead of comparing stores, we compared which shops waste more packaging. Students immediately started talking about what could be reduced.*" Another teacher shared a similar task adaptation in the following excerpt: "*We debated whether governments should subsidize renewable energy. The book did not provide much about climate, but the framework was perfect for it.*"

At the same time, teachers highlighted several constraints. They pointed to pressures such as the need to complete the syllabus, exam-oriented instruction, and institutional cultures that frame sustainability as an "extra" rather than a core component of language teaching. As one teacher asserted, "*We are pushed to finish the book. Sustainability doesn't count unless it is in the test.*" This observation aligns with Goulah's (2015) argument that the integration of sustainability in ELT often depends more on teachers' individual agency than on curriculum design. From an ecolinguistic perspective, these practices represent clear instances of resistance to the absence or marginalization of ecological narratives. However, despite their pedagogical value, such practices remain fragile and uneven, as they lack systematic curricular support.

The comparative analysis reveals distinct patterns in how each coursebook series aligns with the three sub-targets of SDG 13. Target 13.3 (education and awareness) is the most frequently addressed, whether through explicit textual coverage (Ready For B2, World

English), pedagogical affordances (Evolve), or potential extensions at higher levels (American English File). In contrast, Target 13.2 (integration into policy and planning) is largely absent in the coursebooks. Although learners in Ready For B2 are encouraged to debate individual versus systemic responsibility, systemic actors are implied rather than explicitly foregrounded. Target 13.1 (resilience) appears only sporadically, most notably in World English 3, which addresses hurricanes and sea-level rise, or in Ready For B2 through incidental references to environmental hazards. However, none of the series offers a sustained curricular approach to systematically cultivating resilience to climate-related risks. Table 2 presents a comparative synthesis of these findings.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the analyzed global EFL coursebooks are not fully aligned with SDG 13. While Ready For B2 and World English series provide some counter-stories and ecological hooks, Evolve depends heavily on teacher mediation, and American English File series entrenches consumerism with little ecological presence. Teachers' voices underscore both the possibilities and the limitations. That is, while sustainability may be inserted, the absence of structural integration renders climate literacy fragile. From an ecolinguistic perspective, the examination of the ELT series illustrate how dominant consumerist narratives are naturalized, ecological concerns are fragmented, and counter-stories of care and resilience are introduced, albeit often marginally. When considered in relation to the SDG framework, education and awareness are only partially addressed, resilience appears sporadically, and policy integration is largely absent. As one teacher succinctly concluded, *"students leave knowing how to shop and travel in English, but not how to talk about the climate crisis. Until coursebooks change, climate literacy will depend on teachers going beyond the page."*

Discussion

This study set out to examine how widely used EFL coursebooks represent sustainability in relation to SDG 13: Climate Action, as well as how teachers interpret and mediate these representations in their classroom practices. The findings reveal an uneven and fragmented landscape, indicating that sustainability is often treated as an optional topic rather than a core pedagogical concern in ELT. Consequently, engagement with SDG 13 tends to rely largely on teachers' individual material development and pedagogical interventions, rather than on systematic curricular integration. Taken together, these findings carry important implications for ELT's engagement with SDG 13, offering both theoretical contributions to ecolinguistics and practical insights for materials developers and language teachers.

Table 2
Comparative Alignment of Coursebooks with SDG 13

Theme	Ready For	Evolve	American English File	World English
Explicit ecological content	A small number of units addressing environmental themes (e.g., <i>World Days</i>); sustainability appears intermittently	Ecological topics are not a central focus; climate-related domains are generally treated within everyday lifestyle contexts	Environmental themes are rarely foregrounded; focus remains on everyday communicative topics	Ecological themes are integrated across levels through texts and multimedia materials
Consumerist narratives and alternative perspectives	Occasional references to shared responsibility appear alongside exam-oriented and lifestyle narratives	Predominantly lifestyle-oriented narratives, with potential ecological interpretations remaining implicit	Strong emphasis on consumption-related topics (e.g., shopping, travel, services)	Greater emphasis on narratives of care, resilience, and human-environment relationships
Teacher mediation and agency	Teachers report facilitating discussions and reflections when ecological content is present	Teachers frequently adapt and extend tasks to introduce sustainability-related perspectives	Teachers often supplement materials with additional sustainability-focused content	Teachers mainly extend and elaborate on ecological themes already present in the materials
Alignment with SDG 13 (13.1 / 13.2 / 13.3)	Most closely aligned with SDG 13.3; limited references to SDG 13.2 and 13.1	Partial alignment with SDG 13.3 through task design; limited engagement with SDG 13.1 and 13.2	Limited alignment with SDG 13 targets	Strong alignment with SDG 13.3 and moderate alignment with SDG 13.1; limited focus on SDG 13.2

Interpreting the findings through Stibbe’s (2021) ecolinguistic framework of “the stories we live by” reveals a persistent tendency to privilege economic aspiration over ecological entanglement. Sustainability is presented episodically rather than as a coherent thread shaping how learners imagine their roles and relationships within the world. In other words, sustainability tends to surface as isolated events rather than as an overarching narrative. This pattern reinforces Pennycook’s (2017) observation that ELT is often framed as a pathway to tourism, mobility, and personal advancement, thereby rendering ecological concerns peripheral to communicative competence. In this respect, the present findings extend Stibbe’s (2021) work by demonstrating how consumerist norms become normalized and unremarkable in contexts where ecological discourse is marginal or absent.

The counter-stories articulated by teachers such as moments emphasizing resilience or shared responsibility demonstrate the possibility of alternative pedagogical orientations. This finding aligns with Gadotti’s (2008) conception of critical eco-pedagogy, in which language learning becomes a space for reimagining reality rather than merely representing it. At the same time, sustainability often emerges as a discretionary element that teachers choose to incorporate, as curricular frameworks tend not to prioritize it.

This situation resonates with Hiver & Whitehead's (2018) notion of pedagogical discontinuity, whereby responsibility for integrating broader educational aims is disproportionately placed on teachers. Teacher mediation thus operates as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the integration of ecological themes into classroom contexts reflects strong pedagogical agency, consistent with Surkamp and Viebrock's (2018) analysis of teachers' mediating roles in negotiating ideological content. On the other hand, institutional expectations and structural constraints limit teachers' autonomy to incorporate ecological themes into their teaching practices. As several teachers noted, sustainability does not count unless it is assessed. In this respect, the present study supports Goulah's (2015) argument that sustainability in ELT constitutes a structural vulnerability rather than merely a curricular gap.

The patterns identified in this study provide insight into ELT's engagement with SDG 13. While certain activities and reflective tasks address aspects of SDG 13.3, limited attention is given to SDG 13.2. UNESCO's (2025) analysis similarly notes that educational resources often treat the SDGs as symbolic gestures rather than as transformative agendas. Furthermore, the minimal engagement with SDG 13.1 suggests that ELT is not yet fully equipped to address the broader societal consequences of climate change, such as migration and its implications for everyday practices. This observation echoes Jones et al., (2010) argument that the complex interconnections between ecological crises and social structures are frequently overlooked in educational programs. As a result, learners' capacity to engage critically with sustainability challenges is constrained. Taken together, these insights point to the need for a shift in narrative focus from individualized actions toward a more structural understanding of climate change. Without such a shift, ELT risks fostering a superficial and episodic form of ecological literacy that remains disconnected from the lived realities of the climate crisis.

The findings of this study also contribute to broader discussions of critical eco-pedagogy (Gadotti, 2008; Goulah, 2015). Critical eco-pedagogy calls on teachers to challenge unsustainable ideologies and promote ecological awareness through education. The present findings suggest that most of the analyzed EFL coursebooks do not yet fully meet this challenge. Instead, the integration of sustainability largely depends on teachers' individual initiatives. To move beyond isolated classroom efforts and implement eco-pedagogy more systematically, sustainability must be embedded in instructional materials through the involvement of publishers and policymakers. Such an approach would alleviate the disproportionate burden currently placed on language teachers to integrate ecological awareness into their teaching. This need aligns with SDG 4.7, which emphasizes the role of education in advancing sustainable development, and is also consistent with SDG 13's call for increased awareness and strengthened resilience.

Pedagogical Implications

From a pedagogical perspective, several pedagogical implications can also be drawn from the findings. First, materials developers and coursebook designers should recognize that sustainability-related themes can be integrated into coursebooks without disrupting instructional flow. Conventional activities such as debates, discussions, reading passages, and even controlled practice can serve as effective platforms for embedding sustainability content. As demonstrated by the World English series, the inclusion of authentic ecological materials can significantly support communicative language practice. Second, teacher education programs bear responsibility for equipping teachers with strategies to critically analyze and re-story instructional texts. Without such preparation, teachers may unintentionally reproduce consumerist narratives or rely on improvised sustainability-related activities without systematic pedagogical support. Indeed, the study reinforces the argument that ELT needs stronger alignment with the principles of the SDGs. Although international policy frameworks emphasize the central role of education in fostering sustainability awareness (UNESCO, 2025), the findings indicate that many widely used EFL coursebooks fall short of these objectives. Consequently, education for sustainability should not rely on supplementary lessons or individual teacher efforts alone but must be embedded structurally within ELT curricula and materials.

Third, teacher education programs can allocate parts to sustainability which raises the ecolinguistic awareness of the trainees. In other words, EFL teachers need training to develop the ability to examine coursebook discourses regarding ecological issues and how to represent them in their practice. Additionally, they need to develop the ability to change the materials which promote consumerist behavior into an environment-focused material. Several strategies could be presented to help EFL teachers reframe the activities and transform them into tasks that incorporate ecological content. Fourth, coursebook writers and publishers should embed sustainability in a systematic manner rather than treating it as an episodic addition. The communicative nature of many existing coursebook tasks offers valuable opportunities to engage with environmental issues and raise learners' ecological awareness. Designing tasks that align with SDG 13 can also reduce the pressure on teachers to improvise sustainability-related activities. Finally, EFL learners should not be positioned merely as consumers of language. Rather, they should be viewed as global citizens capable of engaging in climate action. Coursebooks such as World English illustrate how language learning can integrate linguistic competence with ecological responsibility by foregrounding environmental themes and emphasizing narratives of care, resilience, and sufficiency. Material developers can draw on such models to position climate literacy as a core component of communicative competence rather than as an optional or peripheral concern.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation of sustainability in EFL coursebooks and their alignment with SDG 13 Climate Action through an ecolinguistic lens. Four globally used EFL coursebook series were selected for analysis. The findings indicate that although Ready For B2 and World English include ecological concerns and counter-narratives of care and resilience, these representations are largely episodic and rarely systemic. The Evolve series offers strong pedagogical affordances but largely overlooks environmental themes. In contrast, the American English File series consistently foregrounds consumerist narratives while offering little to no engagement with environmental issues. Teachers attempted to address these gaps through mediation and re-storying practices. However, their efforts were constrained by curricular demands and institutional expectations.

In general, the ecolinguistic analysis of both coursebooks and teachers' perspectives reveals the persistent dominance of consumerist discourse within ELT. Nevertheless, the study is subject to several limitations, including a restricted sample of coursebooks and a relatively small number of participants for qualitative data collection. Future research could expand the corpus to include a broader range of global and locally produced coursebooks. In addition, greater attention should be given to multimodal resources, such as teachers' guides and digital learning platforms. Combining classroom ethnography with materials analysis would further illuminate how sustainability is enacted in practice. Moreover, intervention-based studies could explore how ecolinguistic re-storying of tasks influences learners' ecological awareness and agency. In conclusion, the findings suggest that ELT has yet to fully align with the principles of SDG 13. Unless sustainability is embedded systematically within EFL coursebooks and supported through teacher education, climate literacy will continue to depend on the fragile and uneven improvisations of individual language teachers.

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Ethics Declarations

World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

This study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

Data Availability

Data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

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