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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The representation of ecological consciousness of child characters in *Anak Guo* by Desti Natalia: Glotfelty's ecocritical study

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ABSTRACT
The study aims to reveal ecological consciousness in child characters in Anak Guo by Desti Natalia; relate it to principles of environmental ethics; and use this representation in learning activities. A descriptive qualitative method was employed to explore the story, anchored in Cheryll Glotfelty ecocritical approach. The results revealed ecological consciousness in the characters' actions upon preserving environmental sustainability (e.g., conservation of biodiversity, harmonious relationships between living things), responsible decisions, and their interaction with nature (ecological responsibility). These representations mirror the environmental ethics principles (i.e., respect for nature; responsibility toward nature; solidarity with nature; love and care for nature; non-interference with natural life). Furthermore, these values are reinforced by Minangkabau local wisdom conveyed through cultural expressions in the story. This study highlights the important role of children's literature as an effective medium for fostering ecological consciousness and environmentally responsible behavior.
Keywords: representation; children's literature; Glotfelty's ecocriticism.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems are among the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century. These issues involve environmental pollution and the loss of biodiversity, which have caused tangible consequences and disasters resulting from environmental exploitation. One of the most important impacts was the flash flood of West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra, in late November 2025 (Tempo, 2025). These problems highlight the need for collective efforts to cultivate ecological consciousness, particularly among children, who will play an important role in future environmental sustainability.

Neolaka (Purnami, 2020) describes ecological consciousness as the awareness of and responses to the environment that is reflected in our actions. The environment is a whole ecosystem that includes all the things that live in it, human behaviour, and other living beings. Children's literature can help promote ecological consciousness and are good for sharing knowledge and examples of responsible behaviour. In fact, literature has suggested that such examples can be delivered not only through visual representations but also through literary works. In this regard, literature adapted to children's developmental stage can be a valuable medium for strengthening ecological consciousness (Herbowo, 2020; Khasanah et al., 2024; Lestari & Wijaya, 2025).

Children's literature comprises literary works specifically intended for children, read by children, and essentially guided by adults (Sarumpaet, 2010). This guidance aims to help children interpret their reading in a manner that is appropriately directed, balanced, and grounded in reality. In other words, adults play a role in helping children understand realities and positive values that may contribute to their future development. In children's literature, ecological consciousness can be fostered through the portrayal of relationships between humans and nature, as well as through messages emphasizing the importance of environmental preservation. The portrayal of characters in children's literature is particularly crucial because children are at a developmental stage in which they seek ways to establish their identities and may emulate the behaviors of literary characters in real-life situations (Ferguson, 2024; Lesnik-Oberstein, 2017; Mahpudoh et al., 2024; Nurgiyantoro, 2023).

As a form of children's literary text, a short story can be a rich resource for fostering ecological consciousness among children. This is because short stories are generally associated with the notion of *dulce et utile*, or "sweet and useful," which combines entertainment with educational value and may support children's development. The

orientation toward development through characters in children's literature, particularly in fostering ecological consciousness, can be examined through Glotfelty's concept of ecocriticism. Glotfelty views literary works as representing relationships between humans and nature, thereby providing a basis for examining ecological consciousness and environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is a set of moral principles with real-world consequences: respect and protection of the environment, sustainability, caring for nature, solidarity with nature, love and respect for nature, and non-interference with nature (Endraswara, 2016; Farhaeni, 2023; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Nurgiyantoro, 2023).

Contributing to the current literature, this study aimed to investigate the *story Anak Guo* by Desti Natalia. In the story, the children's actions show how humans relate to nature in the everyday life of Jorong Guo Village. These actions are indicative of ecological consciousness and environmental ethics views that are linked to environmental awareness and local knowledge (Endraswara, 2016; Umsyani et al., 2021). These intertwined relationships form the basis for exploring how ecological consciousness is portrayed in the child and how this relates to environmental ethics issues (Endraswara, 2016; Umsyani et al., 2021). Previous studies have focused on ecological consciousness through characters using Glotfelty's ecocritical paradigm. However, less attention has been paid to how ecological consciousness through children's characters connects with environmental ethics and locally grounded ecological values in children's literature.

This study aims to provide a novel perspective on children's literary texts in order to explain how ecological consciousness is portrayed and intertwined with environmental ethics and local wisdom in Jorong Guo Village. Umsyani et al. (2021) and Ramadhani et al. (2020) introduced Glotfelty's ecocritical approach to explore ecological consciousness through characters in literature using this framework. The relationship between ecological consciousness, environmental ethics, and local wisdom can be explored in order to gain an understanding of children's literature and how it can convey ecological knowledge on the world and the future. This study also contributes to the broader community by advancing ecocritical scholarship, inculcating ecological consciousness, and ethical attitudes towards the environment through the exploration of a literary work.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design. As Mulyana (Fiantika et al., 2022) states, qualitative research is a scientific approach to investigate a topic in its entirety by describing data in detail. In this study, data were described based on facts, characteristics, and relationships among phenomena to give an understanding of how ecological consciousness is depicted in the Anak Guo story. Glotfelty's ecocritical analysis of children's literature was based on the representation of ecological consciousness and its relation to environmental ethics principles.

The data include words, phrases, sentences, and narrative passages that present ecological consciousness and environmental ethics principles through child characters. The criteria for the selected data refer to stories that incorporate local wisdom and environmental ethics as demonstrated through the actions of child characters who exhibit respect, sustainability, solidarity, care, and non-interference with natural world. The data were collected through the examination of books, reports, articles, and other materials containing information relevant to the research (Abubakar, 2021). The analysis involved identifying relevant textual passages, coding representations of ecological consciousness expressed through the child characters, categorizing the data according to forms of ecological consciousness and environmental ethics principles, presenting the categories through descriptive analysis, and drawing conclusions based on the identified relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Glotfelty's theory, literary works represent the relationship between humans and nature to foster ecological consciousness in readers. Ecological consciousness can be reflected through the construction of child characters who interact in concerted efforts to preserve nature (Nurgiyantoro, 2023). Nurgiyantoro also argues that children's literature can highlight the relationship between humans and nature, in which individual characters demonstrate various forms of ecological consciousness. Ecological consciousness reflected through the child characters in *Anak Guo* is closely related to the development of environmental ethics as a moral foundation for human–nature interaction. Environmental ethics is based on the premise that nature has intrinsic value and rights that humans are obliged to respect throughout the processes of life and development (Keraf, 2010). Glotfelty (1996) states that literary works not only reflect relationships between humans and nature but also contain ethical values that guide environmentally responsible behavior. Such ethical

attitudes are evident in various actions involving the preservation, respect, and wise use of nature in Jorong Guo Village. The socio-cultural context of the area, which is populated by Minangkabau, Mandailing, and Javanese ethnic groups, also contributes to harmonious cultural relations and local wisdom that support environmental conservation (Undri, 2018). The representation of ecological consciousness and its relationship with environmental ethics principles in *Anak Guo* is captured in the following excerpts.

> To find *langkitang* (freshwater snails), they didn't need a net or any special tools. All they needed were their hands and a woven rattan basket to collect the langkitang they found. By simply reaching into the water and feeling around the riverbed near the banks, they could find some within seconds. Their natural surroundings were so abundant that they could find almost everything they needed in nature. (Natalia, D., 2018: 22)

The excerpt portrays the children's ecological consciousness through their careful and responsible use of natural resources when collecting *langkitang*. *Langkitang* refers to freshwater snails used for food in West Sumatra (Devi & Arios, 2021), and the author portrays this traditional practice as reflecting environmental ethics and care for nature. Parents pass environmental values on to children from an early age. In the excerpt, the children collect *langkitang* using their hands and a woven rattan bag without specialized fishing equipment. This choice can be interpreted as an ecological act that demonstrates respect for biodiversity and living organisms while also ensuring that the children collect only what they need. Moreover, this practice reflects respect for living organisms along the riverbank and responsible action toward the sustainability of the environment and local communities. The children's actions represent ecological consciousness through their careful use of natural resources and consideration for the natural environment. Nature is portrayed not merely as a source of human needs but as an integral part of life with which humans must maintain a balanced relationship.

This principle is also in line with the proverb held by the local community, "*Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*" (nature spread out before us becomes our teacher). The proverb says that nature is not only a place where humans are born, live, and develop but also a source and guide for human behavior (Satria & Sahayu, 2022). This action by the children when collecting langkitang coheres with what the proverb means. Further depiction of such action is evident in the following excerpt:

> Their excitement and all the fun they were having that day made them lose track of time. It was already 4 p.m. when they finally realized how late it was, after hearing someone calling from the roadside, urging them to hurry home.

> "Children, don't stay by the river too long. It's getting late!" a villager called out from the roadside near the river, where they had been happily fishing.
> "Yes, Ma'am!" Azizah replied. She then invited her four friends to come ashore. Natalia, D., 2018: 18)

The excerpt above represents ecological consciousness as demonstrated by Azizah's compliance with the local community's advice not to remain in the river for too long after 4:00 p.m. This advice can be further supported by the findings of Silvia and Hutasubut (2025), which indicate that nighttime is an active period for zooplankton, during which they migrate from the bottom toward the surface of the water to seek food. Zooplankton serve as a source of nutrients for various organisms in the river; therefore, maintaining the stability of their nighttime activity is critical to ecosystem sustainability. The children's ecological consciousness is reflected in Azizah's compliance with the community's advice, which does not necessarily need to be associated with a mystical context. By implication, the children's compliance with this advice contributes to maintaining natural cycles within the river ecosystem's food chain. When the food chain remains balanced, the river can continue to support local communities through the availability of freshwater fish and *langkitang*, which is used as a primary ingredient in *Langkitang Cucuik* (*gulai langkitang*), a traditional dish from West Sumatra.

The excerpt also demonstrates compliance and responsibility toward nature. Azizah is sensitive to local rules that are meant to keep the river ecosystem functioning. She stops fishing immediately and invites her friends back home. Her decision signals the idea that nature has its own needs and habitats that must be respected, since fish and other organisms start moving around again at dusk. That is environmental responsibility not only in direct care for nature but also in restraint, compliance with ecological rules, and behaviour adaptation to the needs of nature.

The interpretation is consistent with the principles of life that the Jorong Guo Village, West Pasaman, West Sumatra community holds in their proverb "*Alua jo Patuik*". *Alua* means "path" or proper procedure according to customary norms, and *patuik* is "appropriateness" or placing something in its right place (Dilasari, 2018). Dilasari (2018) states that "*alua jo patuik*" is a principle shared among Minangkabau communities as manifested in their behaviors to maintain the environmental balance and harmony. The responsibility towards nature shown by the children's actions not only represents ecological consciousness but also the internalization of "*alua jo patuik*".

> At last, they arrived at the foot of the steps leading up to Guo Torus. Their hearts sank when they saw that the natural attraction in their village was far from beautiful. Plastic waste was scattered everywhere, covering nearly every step leading into the cave.
> "What should we do?" Silvi asked in surprise.
> "We should clean up this trash right away. If the place is clean, Guo Torus will look much more beautiful and attract visitors from other villages," Aziz replied enthusiastically.
> Without wasting any time, the five friends got to work, clearing the steps of all the scattered rubbish. (Natalia, D., 2018: 6-8)

The representation of ecological consciousness evident in the excerpt is reflected in the children's collective effort to clean the Guo Torus area. This consciousness motivates them to clean the area as an effort to preserve biodiversity and address environmental problems in their village. Guo Torus is a natural cave that has been developed as a tourist attraction in Jorong Guo Village and was previously utilized by the local community to collect edible bird's nests (Harianhaluan.com, 2019). Their efforts to address the accumulation of plastic waste around Guo Torus also depict an attempt to protect nature as a source of sustenance for humans, plants, and animals in the surrounding area. This effort is reflected in Aziz's response to Silvi's concern, as he immediately joins her in cleaning up the waste to keep the surrounding area clean and attractive to visitors. This demonstrates that the children can give examples of participation in maintaining the cleanliness of the natural environment, which is increasingly degraded by human activities. If collective ecological consciousness emerges to protect the natural environment, the surrounding community may also benefit from a cleaner and better-maintained environment.

The solidarity with nature is strongly portrayed in the collective actions aimed at addressing environmental degradation. Cooperation and shared responsibility show solidarity with nature because they act together for preserving and improving the environment. This action shows that environmental sustainability is a shared concern that requires concerted active participation. Culturally, this is also consistent with the life principle expressed in a proverb held by the local community, "*mandapek samo balabo, kahilangan samo marugi,*" meaning "those who gain, share the benefit; and those who lose, share the loss" (Sya et al., 2021). The proverb conveys that benefits and losses should be shared collectively so that people have a shared sense of responsibility for sustaining livelihoods. In this context, the solidarity with nature displayed by the children reflects ecological consciousness while embodying the internalization of local values as an ethical guide to ensure the sustainability of the environment and humanity.

The next excerpt represents a form of non-exploitative ecological consciousness toward nature. This form of consciousness is reflected in the interaction between the

children when one of their friends has not caught any fish because only a small number of fish are available in the river ecosystem. To address this situation, Aziz discouraged Amid from using methods that could damage the river in order to catch fish. Instead, Aziz is willing to share his catch with Amid so that Amid will not feel disappointed and can return home. The following excerpt supports this representation of non-exploitative ecological consciousness.

> Azizah then invited her four friends to come ashore.
> "Come on, let's head home. It's getting late!" Azizah said.
> "But I haven't caught any fish yet, Zah," Amid replied, looking sad.
> "Come on, don't be sad, Mid," Aziz said gently.
> "Here, you can have one of my fish. I'm happy to share it with you, Mid," Aziz said with a sweet smile.
> Hearing Aziz's offer, Amid was deeply touched and thanked his friend. After Aziz gave him a fish, they hurried home. (Natalia, D., 2018:18-19)

The representation of ecological consciousness in *Anak Guo* is evident in Aziz's decision to share his catch with Amid rather than attempting to catch fish in excessive quantities. Interpretively, this action also indicates a decline in the fish population in the river, which resulted in a significant disparity in the catches between Aziz and Amid. The indication of declining fish populations in the river flowing through Jorong Guo Village, Nagari Rabi Jonggor, at the time depicted in the story can be connected to environmental problems in 2018, the same year in which *Anak Guo* was published. According to TVRI Sumbar (2017), a river in the area was polluted by waste from a palm oil processing plant, affecting both the surrounding land and the river, leading to a decline in fish population in the river flowing through Nagari Rabi Jonggor. Aziz's action signifies a concern about the river ecosystem and a commitment to maintaining its sustainability and preventing more extensive degradation.

The analysis revealed that the ecological consciousness reflected in Aziz's actions is rooted in the principles of love and care for others as well as concern for the sustainability of the river ecosystem. His decision to share his catch with Amid shows that he knows natural resources should be used according to actual need. The difference in catches shows that the fish population is declining, and Aziz does not want to catch any more fish; the disparity shows him how much there is left, and therefore he does not want to catch any more. Aziz's action is care, indirectly teaching respect for nature's limits and signaling the awareness that measured and responsible fishing activities can help balance and maintain the river ecosystem.

The children's attitude is also in line with the principle held by the local community "*raso jo pareso, raso dibao naiak, pareso dibao turun*". Patrianto et al. (2018) interpret this

principle as an invitation to elevate feeling into thought and bring rational consideration into feeling so that decisions remain in humans' shared values to keep and restore environmental balance. This principle is shown in the children's love and care for nature through habitual practice of protecting, observing, and maintaining living beings in their surrounding environment. This connection suggests that ecological consciousness in the story fosters love and care for nature as an ethical basis for maintaining the relationship between humans and the environment.

Furthermore, the author conveys another representation of ecological consciousness through the children's actions and attitudes, namely respect for the existence of living beings and their habitats. When examined in relation to Endraswara's (2016) concept of environmental ethics, their actions represent respect for nature and other living beings. This ethical principle reflects the view that humans need to establish harmonious relationships with nature by refraining from treating other living beings merely as objects of exploitation. As illustrated in the following excerpt, the children's efforts to establish harmonious relationships with nature can be understood through Rafael's actions and those of the other characters as they observe and enjoy the natural surroundings near the residents' homes and the river in the village. They do not attempt to capture or hunt the monkeys roaming in the area. Aware of the monkeys' activities around him, Rafael deliberately avoids disturbing them or damaging their habitat. This depicts a form of ecological consciousness that respects the existence of living beings and their habitats, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> Along the way, they passed several more villagers' houses, walking briskly and keeping up a lively pace. To reach their destination, they crossed their first little stream, where the water barely reached their ankles. The journey became even more exciting as they spotted lots of monkeys swinging from the tall branches along the stream. Every now and then, Rafael imitated their calls, making his friends burst into laughter. (Natalia, D., 2018:13-14)

A deeper interpretation of the excerpt above indicates that the people of Jorong Guo live in proximity to and alongside monkey habitats. The community does not appear to be disturbed by the monkeys' activities as they swing from tree branches. This depiction suggests that the village is surrounded by extensive forest areas. This interpretation is supported by Minangkabaunews (2022), which notes that Nagari Rabi Jonggor, Gunung Tuleh District, West Pasaman, is one of the *nagari* with extensive forest areas covering most of its territory. Geographically, Nagari Rabi Jonggor is situated in a mountainous area with protected forests. Reflecting these environmental characteristics, Rafael's actions indicate an effort to respect biodiversity while demonstrating a non-interfering relationship between

humans and monkeys. The analysis and interpretation of the excerpt above exemplify ecological consciousness and environmental ethics by portraying children's respect for living beings and their habitats, which may provide relevant examples for children as readers in understanding the importance of preserving their surrounding environment.

The children in *Anak Guo* demonstrate numerous actions indicative of a non-interfering attitude toward natural life during their journey to Guo Torus. The monkeys swinging from the branches of tall trees are left alone. No attempt is made to go near them, disturb them, or damage their habitat. This clearly shows that children know that other living things need to be left alone so they can do what they do without humans interfering. The harmonious relationship between children and the environment shows that ecological consciousness does not always mean big actions but also small choices not to interfere with natural life.

This enduring principle of life is also consistent with a proverb upheld by the local community, *"lamak diawak katuju diurang, sakik dek awak sakik dek urang."* Husni (2024) interprets the proverb as meaning "what is good for us should also be pleasing to others, and what causes us pain also causes pain to others." This proverb explains that every human action, whether good or bad, will ultimately be experienced by others. In an ecological context, this principle reflects the understanding that environmental damage caused by humans will ultimately return to harm humans themselves. Based on this interpretation, the representation of ecological consciousness among the child characters fosters a prudent attitude of non-interference with nature while simultaneously reflecting an internalization of local cultural values that position the balance of nature as a moral foundation of life.

The research results have documented numerous representations of ecological consciousness and its connection to the principles of local environmental ethics. The children in *Anak Guo* demonstrate real-life examples of ethical actions and attitudes to preserve biodiversity, maintain relationships among living beings, sustain ecosystems, and address environmental problems through prudent responses to nature. Furthermore, *Anak Guo* presents the local principles upheld by the community of Jorong Guo Village as a foundation for human relationships with nature. Thus, *Anak Guo* can serve as decent reading material for children as it portrays multiple actions and attitudes devoted to the preservation of nature in the future.

CONCLUSION

The research results have indicated that *Anak Guo* by Desti Natalia denotes an example of children's literature that presents positive attitudes and behaviors toward ecological consciousness through children's actions and behaviors. The story can contribute to shaping young readers' environmental ethics. The story also serves as a medium for representing personality development that is appropriate to children's developmental stages in relation to nature. These representations offer examples of environmentally responsible behavior that may be relevant to children's environmental learning.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

This research utilizes publicly available written data sources and does not involve interviews or specific human participants. The analysis presented reflects the author's in-depth interpretation connecting the data to documented facts gathered through a review of various sources including articles, news reports, books, and other documents. Furthermore, this research is free from any form of fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, duplication, fragmentation ("salami slicing"), or copyright infringement regarding the data or content employed.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

"The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript."

Conflict of Interest

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