Language, Nature, and Curriculum: An Ecolinguistic Analysis of Kenya's Junior School Swahili Setbooks

Tirus Mutwiri Gichuru

Department of Languages & Linguistics, School of Education, Meru University of Science and Technology, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a critical ecolinguistic analysis of selected Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)-approved Kiswahili Literature (Fasihi ya Kiswahili) setbooks for Junior School (JS) education in Kenya, specifically evaluating Mshale wa Matumaini by John Habwe, Zawadi ya Thamani by Assumpta K. Matei, Uteuzi wa Chale by Assumpta K. Matei, and Wema Hauozi by Timothy Arege. Prompted by the transition to Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and its mandate to mainstream Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs) such as environmental sustainability, this paper investigates the linguistic frameworks through which ecological realities are transmitted to young learners. Combining Arran Stibbe's Critical Ecolinguistics framework with M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) transitivity model, the study pursues three core objectives: to analyze micro-linguistic agency through noun class dynamics, reflexives, spatial dichotomies, and verb extensions; to evaluate macro-ideological tensions between capitalist anthropocentric paradigms (Mazingira kama kitega uchumi/Nature as a source of revenue) and indigenous African eco-cosmologies (Utu wa kimazingira); and to examine the subsequent pedagogical implications for curriculum assessment. The findings reveal a rich diversity of stylistic approaches to environmental representation across the selected setbooks. While texts such as Zawadi ya Thamani and Uteuzi wa Chale utilize language for active environmental advocacy, civic agency, and eco-centric balance, others like Mshale wa Matumaini reduce nature to a passive aesthetic background. Furthermore, texts such as Wema Hauozi employ stative extensions and reflexive markers (such as -ji-) that systematically erase human accountability, framing environmental degradation and climate crises as uncaused or self-inflicted natural phenomena. While some setbooks display limitations in framing environmental agency, they address other vital Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs) and core CBC competencies. Ultimately, this study proposes an actionable framework for integrating "Ecolinguistic Literacy" into JS assessment metrics and offers structural recommendations for curriculum vetting.

Keywords: Critical Ecolinguistics, Eco-Cosmology, Transitivity, Erasure

INTRODUCTION

The Convergence of Curriculum Reform and Ecological Crisis

The global education sector is undergoing a massive paradigmatic shift as it attempts to respond to the anthropocentric pressures of the 21st century, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and systemic ecological collapse. In East Africa, and Kenya in particular, this pedagogical evolution is structurally manifested in the transition from the knowledge-based 8-4-4 system to the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). A core pillar of the CBC is the explicit integration of Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs) at all level of education (KICD, 2017). These PCIs mandate the mainstreaming of environmental education, sustainability, and citizenship across all academic disciplines, moving away from the historical isolation of ecological themes within traditional geography or biology classrooms.

Concurrently, the creation of the Junior School (JS) tier, comprising Grades 7, 8, and 9; marks a critical developmental phase where learners cross the psychological and cognitive threshold from childhood to

adolescence. At this precise developmental juncture, the linguistic frameworks through which individuals perceive, categorize, and value the non-human world become solidified. The vocabulary, figurative language, and narrative structures introduced to learners during this period act as permanent cognitive lenses that dictate their lifetime interaction with the biosphere, cementing foundational ecological literacy, ethical responsibility, and environmental stewardship.

Structure of Literature in the CBC Framework

Under the guidance of the KICD, literature within the CBC framework progresses systematically from experiential, oral forms in early childhood to integrated language arts in middle school, ultimately culminating in specialized academic disciplines in senior secondary education as shown on table 1:

Table 1: Structure of Literature in the CBC Framework

Tier & Grades	Pedagogical Focus	Key Literature Elements	Curriculum Delivery
Early Years Education (PP1 – Grade 3)	Foundational Literacy & Culture	Oral narratives, songs, riddles, and simple proverbs Indigenous language storytelling	Embedded in Language Activities and Mother Tongue/L_1 learning
Upper Primary & Junior School (Grades 4 – 9)	Integrated Language Arts	Short stories, character analysis, basic poetic forms Swahili oral and written literature (Fasihi ya Kiswahili)	Integrated within English and Kiswahili core learning areas
Senior School (Grades 10 – 12)	Specialized Subject Pathways	Full-length novels, set plays, comparative poetry, literary criticism Advanced analysis of Fasihi Simulizi and Fasihi Andishi	Stand-alone subjects (Literature in English, Fasihi ya Kiswahili) within the Arts & Social Sciences pathway

The Role of Swahili Literature in Fostering Ecological Literacy

Within the Kenyan educational landscape, Fasihi ya Kiswahili (Kiwahili Literature) occupies a unique ideological and socio-cultural space. Far from serving as a mere medium for language acquisition or grammatical drilling, Fasihi acts as an expansive cultural repository and a powerful mechanism for ethical socialization. The narratives approved KICD for Junior School learners do not exist in a political or ecological vacuum; rather, they construct deeply entrenched mental models of the world. Consequently, the selection of these set texts is a deliberate, rigorous, and highly consequential process. Developing an eco-literate generation through the school curriculum is the most potent, long-term strategy for mitigating climate change (Gichuru & Thuranira, 2025). In Upper Primary and Junior School, environmental literacy is integrated across core disciplines, placing Fasihi ya Kiswahili at the forefront of value-based environmental education.

The Statement of the Problem

Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) aims to teach learners environmental responsibility through Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs). However, it is unclear how approved Junior School literature actually presents nature to students. Do these setbooks encourage students to protect the environment, or do they quietly teach them to view nature merely as something for humans to use and exploit?

This core problem stems from a systemic pedagogical contradiction: if these approved setbooks portray nature merely as an agentless background, an empty setting, or a commodified economic resource, they actively undermine the curriculum's ultimate goal of raising environmentally conscious, active, and responsible citizens. Crucially, the texts analyzed in this study represent the inaugural selection cycle approved by the KICD for Junior School level. Because these pioneer texts establish both the pedagogical baseline and ideological template for future textbook approvals, examining how they construct nature is essential. Without a critical examination of their language, grammar, and thematic framing, the education system risks conditioning an entire generation to view environmental destruction as natural, uncaused, or unavoidable. This study addresses this critical gap by evaluating the latent ecological ideologies transmitted to Kenyan learners through these foundational setbooks.

Study objectives

General Objective

The general objective of the study was to examine how KICD-approved Kiswahili Junior School setbooks construct environmental consciousness within Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum.

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To analyze the micro-linguistic framing of ecological agency and accountability within KICD-approved Kiswahili Junior School setbooks.
- To evaluate macro-ideological tensions between market-driven anthropocentric paradigms, urban-rural spatial dichotomies, aesthetic reductionism, and active ecological advocacy embedded within selected literary texts.
- To examine the pedagogical implications of these local linguistic framings within Kenya's CBC and formulate actionable frameworks for assessing Ecolinguistic literacy in the modern classroom

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Ecolinguistics: Stibbe's Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in Critical Ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2021). Unlike traditional structural linguistics, which treats language as an isolated, closed system of signs, ecolinguistics analyzes language in its physical, biological, and socio-ecological contexts. Stibbe's framework operates on the fundamental premise that human behavior toward the environment is profoundly driven by what he terms "Stories We Live By"; deeply seated often-unconscious cognitive models that dictate how we treat the ecosystem.

Stibbe (2021) categorizes these linguistic manifestations into specific types:

- **Ideologies**: Systems of thought that shape how individuals view their place within the broader hierarchy of the world.
- **Erasure:** The linguistic rendering of nature as invisible, passive, irrelevant, or uncaused.
- **Salience:** The linguistic foregrounding of ecological systems, deliberately giving them agency, presence, and intrinsic value.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Transitivity

To operationalize Stibbe's macro-framework at micro-linguistic level, his paper utilizes M.A.K. Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) transitivity model. In SFL, transitivity is concerned with how meaning is represented within the clause. It breaks down any described action or state into three core components:

- **Processes:** The core verb types that signal the nature of the action (Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioral, Verbal, Existential).
- **Participants:** The entities involved in the process, designated roles such as Actor (the one performing the action), Goal (the entity impacted by the action), Sayer, Senser, or Carrier.
- **Circumstances:** The context surrounding the process, such as Location, Time, or Manner.

By examining transitivity patterns within Swahili syntax, this study measures who acts (Actor) and who is acted upon (Goal) when humans interact with the natural environment in the selected narratives.

The Concept of Eco-Cosmologies

Crucial to this study is the deployment of the term Eco-Cosmology. An eco-cosmology is a holistic worldview that treats humanity, nature, and the spiritual or ancestral realms as a single, interdependent matrix rather than disjointed entities (Stibbe, 2021). Unlike anthropocentric or capitalist paradigms that view the environment as a passive commodity and a mere storehouse of resources awaiting capitalist extraction (kitega uchumi), traditional eco-cosmologies regard the earth as a living, sacred subject endowed with intrinsic value and moral agency (Ramose, 2005; Mpetsheni, 2026).

Eco-cosmology is anchored in the indigenous philosophy of Utu (humanity/personhood), as articulated by scholars including Mbiti (1969), Ngũgĩ (1986), Etieyibo (2017), and Dzah, 2024). While contemporary sociology often reduces Utu (or Ubuntu) to human-centered empathy, an ecolinguistic reading reclaims its holistic scope to encompass the non-human realm, a paradigm this study terms utu wa kimazingira (ecological personhood). As Etieyibo (2017) emphasizes, Ubuntu posits that humans, non-human organisms, and ecosystems belong to an interconnected "community of beings" bound by communal care and relational accountability. In Kenya, state-sanctioned literary setbooks do more than instruct language mechanics and literary techniques; they actively construct the ecological ethics, social values, and worldviews of young learners. Consequently, this paper confronts a fundamental socio-literary question: What ethos of earth stewardship are these setbooks conditioning young readers to internalize?

The Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum is structurally anchored in national policy frameworks, including the 2010 Constitution, to transform learners into engaged, empowered, and ethical citizens equipped for 21st-century demands (KICD, 2016; Okeyo & Kanake, 2021).

Grammatical Ideology versus Thematic Content

To resolve a recurring weakness in literary analysis, this study maintains a strict distinction between a text's explicit **environmental themes** and its latent **ecological ideology** inferred from grammar. A text may exhibit pro-environmental themes on the surface by discussing conservation topics, yet its underlying grammatical structures can run counter to those themes by erasing human accountability through agentless or stative verb forms.

Linguistic ideology operates beneath thematic awareness, shaping the learner's subconscious worldview through repetitive syntactic framing rather than overt plot points. This study moves beyond descriptive content analysis to interrogate the structural alignment between what a text openly advocates and what its grammar implicitly teaches.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Literary Criticism

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates how language constructs, maintains, and challenges power relations and ideologies (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2014). In critical literary analysis, CDA shifts the locus of investigation from passive plot summaries to interrogating the ideological work that texts perform. In the context of this paper and in East African secondary education, Swahili setbooks function as powerful pedagogical instruments and ideological apparatuses.

The linguistic choices, character representations, and narrative trajectories within these setbooks do not merely entertain; they socialize young readers into specific value systems, conditioning their ethical posture toward society and the natural environment. In operationalizing CDA for literary texts, researchers analyze specific micro-linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms:

- **Lexical Choice and Naming (Lexicalization)**: The deliberate selection and framing of vocabulary encode moral evaluations and underlying ideologies (Machin & Mayr, 2023). For instance, lexicalizing land as mama ardhi (mother earth) evokes an indigenous, relational eco-cosmology grounded in Ecological personhood (Stibbe, 2021).

- **Transitivity and Agency:** Transitivity analysis examines how grammatical structures assign roles to actors, processes, and entities within a clause (Fairclough, 2003). By manipulating transitivity, such as employing passive voice or agentless constructions, texts can obfuscate responsibility for environmental degradation or strip non-human entities of active moral agency (Machin & Mayr, 2023).

- **Modality:** Modality measures the degree of certainty, authority, obligation, or necessity encoded in language through modal verbs and adverbs (must, should, naturally, inevitably). High-affinity modal choices present culturally constructed viewpoints as undeniable, universal truths, effectively naturalizing dominant economic or anthropocentric ideologies (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2014).

- **Silencing, Omission, and Exclusion:** Ideology operates as forcefully, through what is omitted as through what is explicitly stated. CDA scrutinizes textual exclusions, identifying which perspectives, non-human actors, or indigenous ecological ethics are systematic backgrounded or entirely omitted from the narrative discourse (Stibbe, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, text-based critical descriptive research design, synthesizing the analytical frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Ecolinguistics. This qualitative design provides the structural tools required to expose the latent relationships between micro-linguistic choices in literature and the macro-ideologies of environmental conservation within educational media.

Data Corpus and Sampling

The study utilizes a census sampling approach, examining all primary Kiswahili literary texts on the official Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) approved list for Junior Schools. Representing distinct genres and thematic focuses across the complete junior school literature curriculum, the data corpus comprises four core setbooks:

- Zawadi ya Thamani by Assumpta K. Matei (Oxford University Press) – Grade 7 Novella
- Uteuzi wa Chale by Assumpta M. Matei (One Planet Publishers) – Grade 7 Novella
- Wema Hauozi by Timothy Arege (Access Publishers) – Grade 8 Play
- Mshale wa Matumaini by John Habwe (Access Publishers) – Grade 9 Novella

Note: KICD also maintains an approved list of supplemental Kiswahili readers and anthologies such as Hodi Hodi Mashairi for poetry alongside core literature setbooks.

These are not subject of this study. All of these materials are listed on the official KICD website.

Data Extraction Protocol and Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the clause. A strict, transparent three-tier protocol was established to govern the selection and extraction of textual evidence:

Environmental Keyword Screening: Textual data was filtered using a pre-defined taxonomy of baseline Kiswahili environmental lexemes. These keywords spanned four thematic domains: **Fauna/Flora** (ndege, njiwa, mbwa, fisi, miti, msitu, mwitu, mzeituni); **Hydrology** (mto, chemichemi, maji, visima); **Topography/Landscape** (milima, theluji, nyika, ardhi, mchanga); and **Meteorology** (ukame, jua, hewa, mvua).

Clause Selection Criteria: A clause was systematically extracted and logged only if it satisfied at least one of the following criteria:

- It directly attributes an action, state, or quality to a natural element.
- It depicts human interaction with, or exploitation of, the physical environment.
- It uses a natural element metaphorically or evaluative to convey broader narrative themes.

Consistency and Reliability Procedures: To ensure high interpretive consistency and minimize researcher bias, a parallel intra-rater reliability check was implemented. The entire corpus was coded twice by the researcher over a staggered four-week interval. Any discrepancies in transitivity coding or ideological classification were resolved by benchmarking against the operational definitions.

Operational Definitions and Analytical Procedures

The analytical procedure was executed in three distinct, sequential stages designed to map structural linguistic properties to ideological subtexts:

Stage 1: Lexical Mapping and Transitivity Coding

Using Hallidayan **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL),** clauses were coded to establish the structural position of natural elements. Natural elements were classified as either **Actors** (the active entity performing a process), **Goals** (the entity impacted by a process), or **Mediums** (the entity through which a process occurs without an explicit external instigator). This stage directly determined whether natural elements are granted active agency or treated as passive backdrops.

Stage 2: Morphological Marker and Verb Extension Mapping

This stage scrutinized the morphological structure of Kiswahili verbs within the extracted clauses to evaluate accountability. Analysis targeted:

- **The Stative Extension (-ika / -uka)**: Operationalized as a structural marker that isolates a state of being (e.g., yameharibika, yamepunguka), potentially de-emphasizing the human instigator.
- **The Reflexive Prefix (-ji-)**: Operationalized as an indicator of self-imposed actions (e.g., yajifia, imejikunja), which structurally portrays natural processes or degradation as spontaneous and uncaused.

Stage 3: Ideological Categorization and Ecolinguistic Framework

Micro-linguistic data from Stages 1 and 2 were mapped against Arran Stibbe's macro-categories of ecolinguistics to identify three primary structural tensions:

- **Aesthetic Setting**: Discourse where the environment is presented strictly for its scenic or sensory value (kulingana na mbinu za urembo), devoid of explicit ecological utility or conservation mandates.
- **Ecological Advocacy**: Discourses that actively assign ethical responsibility to human actors, framing environmental protection as a deliberate, agent-driven obligation.

- **Erasure and Blame Shifting:** Discourses where human agency in ecological degradation is structurally obscured, masked, or transferred to uncaused natural phenomena (e.g., framing anthropogenic drought as an autonomous event).

Table 2: Illustrative Ecolinguistic Coding Framework

The table below illustrates how the analytical protocol translates textual extracts into systematically coded linguistic and ecolinguistic categories:

Original Kiswahili Extract	English Translation	Grammatical & Morphological Feature	Participant Role (SFL)	Ecolinguistic Category	Interpretive Justification
"...iliyokuwa na milima na mito ya kuvutia." (Mshale wa Matumaini, p. 11)	"...which had attractive mountains and rivers."	Attributive relational process; qualifying adjectives.	Carrier or Existential State.	**Aesthetic Setting**	The natural landscape is framed as a passive backdrop for narrative imagery rather than a domain requiring human conservation or ethical responsibility.
"...yakichota mchanga wa ujenzi katika mto wa Imani." (Zawadi ya Thamani, p. 66)	"...scooping construction sand from River Imani."	Active material process; explicit agentive verb extension.	Actor: Human entity (implied by malori). Goal: Mchanga.	**Ecological Degradation**	Language explicitly maps human agency directly to resource depletion, making anthropogenic impact visible to the reader.
"Watazingizia ukame… Watasema maji yamepungua..." (Wema Hauozi, p. 17)	"They will blame drought… They will say water has decreased..."	Stative verb extension (-pungua); gent-shifting verb (-zingizia).	Circumstance of Cause (Ukame); Medium (Maji).	**Erasure or Blame Shifting**	By attributing power outages to an autonomous natural state (ukame), the text shifts culpability away from systemic human failure or climate change mismanagement.
"Mimea yajifia! Oo, maji yamepungua mitoni..." (Wema Hauozi, p. 29)	"Plants are dying on their own! Oh, water has decreased..."	Reflexive marker (-ji-); Stative extension (-ua).	Reflexive Medium (Mimea); Agentless Subject (Maji).	**Erasure of Agency**	The grammar structurally frames the wilting of crops as a self-inflicted, autonomous act (yajifia), potentially masking human environmental drivers from the learner.

Ethical Considerations

This research relies exclusively on text-based analysis of publicly available literary setbooks. It does not involve human subjects or animal testing, requires no institutional clearance for field research, and presents no conflict of interest.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Aesthetic Backgrounding and Instrumental Framing in Mshale wa Matumaini

In John Habwe's Mshale wa Matumaini, natural elements are predominantly framed as passive environmental settings or aesthetic ornaments rather than active ecological participants. The narrative language in this text leans heavily toward an anthropocentric perspective, where the non-human world primarily serves to reflect human emotional states or anchor physical movements, leaving ecological agency and conservation advocacy unaddressed.

Aestheticization and Psychological Projection in Fauna Description

Fauna in this narrative tends to function as a tool for reflecting human psychological states rather than as an independent ecological entity possessing intrinsic value:

Extract 1:"...njiwa wangu waliokuwa katika matundu yao walikuwa wakitoa sauti zao tamu ambazo siku ile nilizitafsiri kama za dhiki. Nilitaka angalau nipate muda mfupi wa kuwasikiliza ndege wangu wakiimba lakini sikuwa na muda huo." (p. 10).

Translation: "...my pigeons that were in their nests were making their sweet sounds which, on that day, I interpreted as cries of distress. I wanted at least to get a short moment to listen to my birds singing, but I didn't have that time.")

The vocalizations of the birds (sauti zao tamu) are framed through an evaluative lens that prioritizes human auditory appreciation (sauti tamu) over independent ecological significance. The textual grammar suggests that the non-human world is primarily assigned meaning through human emotional projections (nilizitafsiri kama za dhiki), which potentially distances the reader from recognizing autonomous interspecies value. By treating the birds' presence as an optional aesthetic pastime that the narrator lacks the time to acknowledge (sikuwa na muda huo), the discourse limits opportunities to foster active environmental stewardship or interspecies reciprocity within the learner.

Topographical Elements as Passive Narrative Stages

Throughout the text, natural features are consistently positioned as passive backgrounds or narrative obstacles rather than active, interconnected ecological components:

Extract 2"...tulikuwa radhi kuitoroka nchi yetu kipenzi iliyokuwa na milima na mito ya kuvutia." (p. 11).

Translation: "...we were ready to flee our beloved country which had attractive mountains and rivers.")

Extract 3: "...tuliendelea na safari kwenye msitu na nyika." (p. 14). **Translation:** "...we continued our journey through the forest and open wilderness."

Extract 4: "...mto ulikuwa mbali nasi." (p. 22). **Translation**: "...the river was far from us."

Extract 5: "...labda mwili wake ungeliwa na mbwa au fisi." (p. 22). **Translation**: "...perhaps his body would be eaten by dogs or hyenas."

The syntactic structuring of topographical elements like mountains and rivers (milima na mito ya kuvutia) in Extract 2 places them as relational attributes of location rather than active participants in an ecological system. The landscapes in Extracts 3 and 4 (msitu na nyika, mto) function textually as passive geometric stages or physical barriers to human transit, offering no deliberate orientation toward ecological conservation or resource management. The framing of fauna in Extract 5 (mbwa au fisi) treats these carnivorous species strictly as prospective instruments for the disposal of human remains (ungeliwa), reinforcing a utilitarian view of wildlife that lacks broader ecological context.

Collectively, these linguistic patterns present nature as a subordinate backdrop to human drama, which may subtly encourage a passive, uncritical environmental attitude among Junior School learners who encounter the text.

Language as Active Advocacy and Ecological Agency in Zawadi ya Thamani

In contrast to the passive positioning observed in Mshale wa Matumaini, Assumpta K. Matei's Zawadi ya Thamani features linguistic structures that frame the environment and its human actors through a lens of active ecological agency, civic responsibility, and community transformation. The text moves from an initial sensory appreciation of nature toward an explicit critique of resource exploitation and collective environmental advocacy.

Sensory Reciprocity, Ecometaphors, and Environmental Personhood

The narrative initially utilizes material processes and ecological metaphors that establish an interactive relationship between human characters and the ecosystem:

Extract 6: "…hewa baridi na safi ilikipiga pambaja kipaji chake laini na kumtia tumaini zaidi." (p. 1).

Translation: "…the cool and fresh air embraced her soft forehead and gave her even more hope.")

Extract 7: "...wanafunzi waliita tovuti hiyo chemichemi ya maarifa..." (p. 6). **Translation:** "...the students called that website a spring of knowledge..."

Extract 8: "...shule ya Mzeituni."(p. 7) **Translation:** "...Mzeituni (Olive) School."

Extract 9: "Nadia aliamshwa na mgoto wa njiwa dirishani mwake... sauti ya njiwa huyo iliufanya moyo wa Nadia kuwa mwepesi." (p. 35) **Translation:** "Nadia was awakened by the tapping of a pigeon at her window... the sound of that pigeon made Nadia's heart light."

Extract 10: "...Nadia aliweza kuona theluji kwenye kilele cha mlima wa Jaha... barabara ilizingirwa na miti mirefu pande zote mbili, Nadia alijipata akizungumza na mazingira matulivu ya Farajani..." (p. 57)

Translation: "...Nadia was able to see the snow on the peak of Mount Jaha... the road was lined with tall trees on both sides; Nadia found herself speaking with the serene environment of Farajani..."

The use of the material process verb ilikipiga pambaja (embraced) in Extract 6 assigns temporary grammatical agency to a natural element (hewa), suggesting a relational cosmology where the physical environment actively interfaces with human psychological well-being. Also, mapping a modern digital domain onto an indigenous hydrological phenomenon (chemichemi ya maarifa) in Extract 7 integrates ecological salience into technological discourse, implicitly framing knowledge as a life sustaining, flowing resource.

Selecting local flora for institutional naming (Mzeituni) in Extract 8 links community infrastructure with ecological identity, which may reinforce a sense of place (topophilia) and awareness of local biodiversity. The syntactic framing in Extract 9 positions a non-human organism (njiwa) as an active participant capable of modifying human interiority, offering an alternative to strict anthropocentric boundaries between human emotion and fauna. More so, characterizing human interaction with the landscape as a dialogic exchange (akizungumza na mazingira) introduces elements of environmental personhood, constructing nature as a communicative partner rather than a silent setting.

Critique of Resource Exploitation & Youth-Led Interrogation

The text shifts from baseline environmental appreciation toward an explicit critique of ecological degradation, mobilizing youth characters as agents of critical inquiry:

Extract 11: "Akiwa njiani, aliyapata malori matatu makubwa ajabu, yakichota mchanga wa ujenzi katika mto wa Imani... nimeona safari za magari haya zimeongezeka huku... ninavyoona mchanga wenyewe unaelekea kuisha... wenye madunde haya **wameweka mikakati gani** kuhakikisha kwamba wametunza mto huu na mingine mingi inayowafadhili kwa mchanga?" (p. 66)

Translation: "On her way, she encountered three surprisingly huge trucks scooping construction sand from River Imani... "I have seen the trips of these vehicles increase around here... from what I see, the sand itself is running out... what strategies have the owners of these trucks put in place to ensure they preserve this river and the many others that supply them with sand?"

Extract 12: **"**Mimi, Hashimu na vijana wengine tumeshakuwa na mijadala kadhaa huku kijijini. Tumeya**dadis**i hata haya ya ukataji wa miti katika mwitu wa Tangamaa... Watu wanatoka mbali kule kuja kuuziwa makaa kutoka huku. Tunataka kuwahimiza kutafuta njia nyingine za kuambulia mapato..." (p. 68).

Translation: "Hashimu, other youths, and I have already held several discussions here in the village. We have interrogated even this issue of deforestation in the Tangamaa Forest... People come from far away to be sold charcoal from here. We want to encourage them to seek alternative sources of income..."

The language in Extract 11 explicitly links commercial machinery (malori) and human enterprise to resource depletion (mchanga... unaelekea kuisha), ensuring that anthropogenic impacts remain grammatically and conceptually visible. By assigning youth protagonists active transitivity roles of mental and verbal interrogation (-dadisi, mijadala), the discourse provides learners with a functional model of civic accountability and critical resource monitoring.

The critique of deforestation in Extract 12 addresses the socio-economic drivers of degradation (kuuziwa makaa), structurally presenting ecological preservation not as an isolated natural phenomenon, but as a challenge requiring alternative livelihood strategies (njia nyingine za kuambulia mapato).

Institutional Mobilization and Educational Ecoliteracy

The final sections of the novella operationalize environmental awareness through formal educational collaboration and structured academic advocacy:

Extract 13: "Nadia alipoamua kuielimisha jamii yake kuhusu matumizi yafaayo ya maliasili, aliomba ushauri wa Bi. Daniela." (p. 71). **Translation:** "When Nadia decided to educate her community on the proper utilization of natural resources, she sought advice from Ms. Daniela."

Extract 14: "Bi. Daniela **alishikana mkono** na Nadia, Hashimu na vijana wengine kuibadilisha mitazamo ya wanajamii kuhusu mazingira na maliasili." (p. 73) **Translation: "**Ms. Daniela joined hands with Nadia, Hashimu, and other youths to positively transform the community's attitudes toward the environment and natural resources."

Extract 15: "Alimwombea Nadia mwaliko nalo shirika likaridhia. Nadia aliamua kuwasilisha makala yenye mada: Uvunaji wa Mchanga: Manufaa na Athari kwa Mazingira... Usimamizi na Matumizi ya Maliasili za Dunia kwa Maendeleo ya Kutegemewa... Kukabiliana na Majanga ya Kimaumbile kama Mkakati wa Usimamizi ufaao wa Maliasili." (p. 73).

Translation: "She requested an invitation for Nadia, and the organization agreed. Nadia decided to present a paper titled: Sand Harvesting: Benefits and Environmental Impacts... Management and Utilization of World Natural Resources for Sustainable Development... Mitigating Natural Disasters as a Strategy for Proper Resource Management."

The transitive structure kuielimisha (to educate) in Extract 13 positions the youth protagonist as an active moral actor, driving environmental remediation through human agency rather than passive observation. The

collaborative verb phrase alishikana mkono (joined hands) in Extract 14 models an intergenerational partnership between educators and youth, framing environmental intervention as a collective social process.

Syntactically targeting community mindsets (kuibadilisha mitazamo) implies a narrative recognition that ecological sustainability requires transforming systemic behavioral patterns rather than managing uncaused crises. Furthermore, the integration of a formal conference agenda into the narrative plot (Uvunaji wa Mchanga: Manufaa na Athari) in Extract 15 serves to validate student research and institutional ecoliteracy, illustrating how academic structures can be leveraged for active environmental advocacy.

Leadership and Sustainable Stewardship in Uteuzi wa Chale

In Uteuzi wa Chale, Assumpta K. Matei expands the text's eco-centric framework by linking political decision-making and civic governance directly with environmental care and community resource management:

Extract 16:"Uteuzi wa Chale haukuwa tu wa kushikilia nafasi ya uongozi, bali ulikuwa mwito wa kulinda rasilimali za jamii na kuhamasisha utunzaji wa mazingira yanayowazunguka." **Translation:** "The selection of Chale was not merely to hold a leadership position, but was a call to protect community resources and promote the care of the surrounding environment.")

Extract 17: "Chale aliongoza vijana wenzake katika kupanda miti na kusafisha mito, akisisitiza kuwa uongozi bora unaanzia kwenye kuthamini ardhi na maliasili zetu." **Translation:** "Chale led his fellow youth in planting trees and cleaning rivers, emphasizing that good leadership begins with valuing our land and natural resources."

In Extract 16, the narrative redefines political governance (uongozi) and choices (uteuzi) not as isolated exercises in anthropocentric authority, but as relational mandates centered on resource protection (kulinda rasilimali) and environmental care (utunzaji wa mazingira). Syntactically, in Extract 17, the youth protagonist (Chale) occupies the active Actor position within material processes (kupanda miti, kusafisha mito), offering learners a practical model of agent-driven ecosystem restoration.

Anchoring effective leadership (uongozi bora) in the intrinsic valuation of land (kuthamini ardhi) in Extract 17 suggests a textual shift toward Ecological personhood (Utu wa Kimazingira), where community welfare is presented as deeply interconnected with ecological integrity. Taken together, Matei's texts systematically position educators and youth as active moral agents, explicitly connecting institutional platforms and civic leadership with real-world community environmental interventions.

Erasure of Accountability, Reflexive Blame, and Shifting Responsibility in Wema Hauozi

In Timothy Arege's Wema Hauozi, micro-linguistic structures, specifically stative extensions, reflexive infixes (-ji-), and externalized causal attributions frequently obscure human agency and accountability for climate crises. Rather than establishing human causality, the text's grammar often portrays environmental degradation as an autonomous, self-inflicted, or spontaneous natural phenomenon.

Institutional Rhetoric and Shifting Blame to Uncaused Phenomena

The dialogue exposes how institutional rhetoric can deflect social responsibility by attributing human-induced resource scarcity to uncaused climatic shifts:

Extract 18: Mabula: "Watazingizia ukame... Watasema maji yamepungua sana katika ule mto mkubwa." (p. 17).

Translation: Mabula: "They will blame it on drought... They will say the water level has dropped significantly in that big river."

The character Mabula highlights a deliberate rhetorical strategy where authorities use a transitive verb of excuse (-zingizia) to shift accountability for systemic infrastructure failures onto an autonomous natural phenomenon (ukame). The choice of the stative verb extension in yamepungua (has decreased) focuses the reader's attention on the resulting state of the river rather than the human drivers, such as upstream deforestation or resource mismanagement, that contribute to lower water levels. This grammatical pattern risks encouraging a passive interpretation among learners, as it positions recurrent droughts as uncaused natural events, potentially masking the systemic human actions driving global warming.

Reflexive Morphology and Self-Inflicted Environmental Degradation

The play frequently deploys reflexive verb structures that grammatically frame agricultural failure and land depletion as processes initiated by nature itself:

Extract 19: Bi Buba: "Wenyewe wanatuambia sababu ya hali ngumu ni ukame mkubwa katika sehemu nyingi za nchi... hapa kwetu mvua ikisita kunyesha kwa wiki moja tu... Mimea yajifia! Oo, maji yamepungua mitoni na visimani!" (p. 29) **Translation:** Bi Buba: "They themselves tell us the reason for these hard times is the severe drought in many parts of the country... here at our home, if rain stops falling for just one week... Plants wither away on their own! Oh, water has decreased in rivers and wells!"

Extract 20: Bi Buba: "Naam, ardhi sasa imejikunja. Si kubwa ya kumilikiwa kama zamani..." (p. 30)

Translation: Bi Buba: "Yes, the land has now folded/shrunk itself. It is no longer large enough to be owned as in the past..."

The use of the reflexive infix **-ji-** in the verb phrase yajifia (dying on its own) in Extract 19 structurally assigns the cause of wilting directly to the crops, presenting plant death as an autonomous act rather than the result of anthropocentrically altered rain cycles. Similarly, in Extract 20, the reflexive construction imejikunja (folded/shrunk itself) frames land degradation and soil fragmentation as a spontaneous action of the earth (ardhi), structurally obscuring the human over-exploitation and population pressures driving land scarcity.

While these reflexive choices serve an artistic purpose by capturing the characters' feelings of helplessness, from an ecolinguistic perspective, they limit the text's ability to clearly map human accountability for environmental degradation.

Negative Framing of Natural Precipitation

Underscoring how literary figurative devices can subvert ecological salience by casting vital life sustaining natural processes in a negative light, the text deploys a deficit metaphor:

Extract 21: "Lakini tusikubali kujiinamia kama mimea iliyonyeshewa kidindia." (p. 20) **Translation:** "But let us not accept drooping like plants heavy with continuous drizzling rain."

In this simile, continuous rain (kidindia) is linked to images of physical weakness and vulnerability (kujiinamia), focusing the learner on the restrictive structural effects of rain on vegetation. By emphasizing droopiness over the vital ecological benefits of precipitation for renewing ecosystems, the metaphor introduces a subtle narrative bias against natural weather patterns. As linguistic choices carry underlying pedagogical weight, framing precipitation through imagery of deficit rather than abundance may inadvertently skew a learner's subconscious evaluation of cyclical natural process

Pedagogical Implications for Kenya's CBC

Redesigning Fasihi Assessment Tools

The findings demonstrate that Kiswahili setbooks within Kenya's Junior School curriculum deliver conflicting ecological messages. To align literature instruction with the Competency-Based Curriculum's (CBC)

Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs), curriculum assessment must move beyond superficial plot recall to systematically evaluate Ecolinguistic Literacy.

The proposed assessment matrix establishes the four foundational pillars required for ecolinguistic evaluation in the Kiswahili classroom:

Table 3: Ecolinguistic Literacy Assessment Matrix

Domain	**Focus / Metric**	**Sub-Competencies & Analytical Tasks**
Micro-Linguistic Analysis	Grammatical Agency & Transitivity	Identifying Actors, Goals, and Circumstances in environmental passages; deconstructing agentless passive and stative verb constructions that obscure responsibility
Ideological Critique	"Stories We Live By"	Evaluating texts for Anthropocentric vs. Eco-centric worldviews; detecting textual instances of Ecological Erasure vs. Ecological Salience
Indigenous Eco-Cosmology	Ecological personhood (Utu wa Kimazingira)	Analyzing cultural metaphors linking community well-being directly with nature; fostering interspecies empathy and relational accountability in literary analysis.
Actionable Civic Advocacy	Environmental Problem-Solving	Designing student-led conservation initiatives derived from literary themes; formulating local environmental critiques based on setbook discourses

Re-engineering Assessment prompts for the JS Classroom

To operationalize this matrix within national examinations and school-based assessments, traditional recall prompts should be re-engineered into critical tasks that evaluate structural linguistic awareness. Table 5.2 demonstrates how classroom questions can be transformed to cultivate an accountable environmental consciousness:

Table 4: Ecolinguistic Literacy Assessment Model

Traditional Literature Question	**Proposed Ecolinguistic Prompts (Questions)**	**Core Competency Cultivated**
Taja mazingira ambamo hadithi ya Mshale wa Matumaini inafanyika. (State the setting where the story takes place.)	Bainisha jinsi maelezo ya "milima na mito ya kuvutia" katika Mshale wa Matumaini yanavyochukulia mazingira kama pambo badala ya kiungo kinachohitaji kutunzwa. (Identify how the description "attractive mountains and rivers" treats nature as an ornament rather than a life-system needing care.)	**Critical Thinking & Analysis:** Enables students to recognize passive environmental tropes in literature.
Eleza ujumbe wa kitabu cha Wema	Ukitumia mfano wa kauli "Mimea yajifia" na "Ardhi imejikunja," eleza jinsi matumizi ya kiambishi 'ji' yanavyoficha mhusika anayesababisha uharibifu wa mazingira. (Using the statements "Plants wither on	**Grammatical & Environmental Accountability:** Teaches learners to spot structural

Hauozi kuhusu ukame. (Explain the book's message about drought.)	their own" and "Land has folded itself," explain how the reflexive marker 'ji' may conceal the actor causing degradation.)	erasure and corporate/human blame-shifting.
Taja wahusika wanaotunza mazingira katika Zawadi ya Thamani na Uteuzi wa Chale. (Name characters who protect the environment.)	Tathmini jinsi Nadia, Bi. Daniela, na Chale wanavyotumia elimu na uongozi kama vyombo vya kutetea mazingira (advocacy). Je, hatua zao zinaonyesha vipi Utu wa Kimazingira? (Evaluate how Nadia, Ms. Daniela, and Chale use education and leadership for environmental advocacy. How do their actions reflect Ecological Personhood?)	**Civic Responsibility & Ecological Personhood:** Encourages proactive community stewardship and environmental leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations for Curriculum Vetting and Teacher Training

Bridging the gap between curriculum policy guidelines and actual classroom practice requires targeted structural interventions in textbook vetting and teacher preparation:

- **Strengthening Textbook Vetting Protocols:** The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should incorporate explicit ecolinguistic metrics into its textbook evaluation and approval frameworks. Approved literary setbooks and supplementary readers should be evaluated for linguistic patterns that risk normalizing environmental degradation, obscuring human agency through stative extensions and reflexive markers (-ji-), or reinforcing binaries that detach human actions from ecological responsibility. Embedding these criteria into KICD evaluation tools ensures that instructional materials actively foster environmental accountability rather than passive acceptance of ecological harm.

- **Integrating Critical Ecolinguistics into Teacher Training:** Pre-service and in-service training programmes for Kiswahili teachers should incorporate Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Ecolinguistics. This training will equip educators with the skills necessary to guide learners in identifying how grammatical structures, metaphors, and transitivity patterns shape representations of environmental agency and accountability. Consequently, educators will be equipped to teach beyond traditional literary approaches that focus solely on elements like plot, setting, themes, and characterization.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Kiswahili Junior School setbooks present competing ecolinguistic representations of human-environment relationships. Zawadi ya Thamani and Uteuzi wa Chale foreground environmental advocacy, civic leadership, and ecological agency, whereas Mshale wa Matumaini predominantly portrays nature as an aesthetic backdrop, while Wema Hauozi employs reflexive and stative grammatical structures that may obscure human responsibility for environmental degradation.

Nevertheless, these findings must be interpreted strictly within the qualitative scope of this study's ecolinguistic focus. Although certain texts exhibit structural limitations in representing environmental agency, they address other mandatory PCIs within the Competency-Based Education framework. The study therefore does not imply a lack of overall educational value in these literary works, but highlights a pedagogical need to complement their existing narrative strengths with critical ecological interpretation.

Ultimately, Kiswahili language and literature teachers remain positioned to cultivate critical ecolinguistic awareness. By guiding learners to examine how syntax represents human-environment relationships, assigns agency, and frames environmental stewardship, educators can bridge the gap between text and action. Teachers must also note that environmental education is structurally integrated across learning areas from Upper Primary to Senior School (Grades 4–12), expanding upon the foundational groundwork established in Early Years Education (PP1–Grade 3) where Environmental Activities operates as a distinct standalone learning area. By systematically embedding critical ecolinguistic awareness into literary instruction and textbook evaluation, Kenya's CBC can more effectively cultivate comprehensive ecological literacy and foster environmentally responsible citizenship among millions of young learners.

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