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**Ecocriticism and Environmental Awareness in Modern
Poetry in Africa**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the ecocriticism and environmental awareness in modern poetry in Africa.

Materials and Methods: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study found that poetry aims to raise environmental awareness by depicting the beauty of natural landscapes and the destructive impact of human activity. Ecocritical poetry often incorporates imagery and symbolism that evoke a sense of urgency regarding climate change, pollution, and conservation efforts. By intertwining aesthetic appreciation with ecological consciousness, modern poets not only reflect

the environmental crises of our time but also inspire readers to contemplate and engage with ecological issues. This growing trend underscores the vital role of literature in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world, thereby contributing to a broader cultural movement towards environmental sustainability.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Ecocritical theory, cultural ecology theory and reader-response theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the ecocriticism and environmental awareness in modern poetry in Africa. In practice, promoting ecocritical poetry involves integrating it into educational curricula and public discourse. Advocating for ecocritical poetry in policy involves influencing cultural and media practices to amplify environmental voices and perspectives.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Environmental Awareness, Modern Poetry*

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism, a scholarly approach that emerged in the late 20th century, examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Environmental awareness and activism among readers in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK have seen a significant rise over the past decade. In the USA, a 2022 Pew Research Center survey indicated that 74% of adults believe the government should do more to protect the environment, and 56% of adults have participated in at least one form of environmental activism in the past year (Pew Research Center, 2022). In Japan, a study published in the *Journal of Cleaner Production* showed that 68% of respondents are aware of environmental issues, with 43% actively engaging in activities like recycling and energy conservation (Nishikawa, 2021). Similarly, in the UK, a 2021 report found that 85% of adults are concerned about climate change, with 61% participating in some form of activism, such as signing petitions or attending protests (YouGov, 2021). These statistics indicate a growing trend of environmental consciousness and proactive behavior among readers in developed economies.

In developing economies, environmental awareness and activism are also on the rise, though often influenced by different factors than in developed economies. In Brazil, for instance, a 2020 survey highlighted that 70% of the population is aware of environmental issues, with 45% engaging in activities such as reforestation and conservation efforts (Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística, 2020). In India, a study found that 60% of urban residents are environmentally aware, and 40% participate in initiatives like waste segregation and water conservation (Kumar & Prakash, 2019). These figures show an increasing recognition of environmental challenges and a growing willingness to participate in mitigating efforts, often driven by immediate environmental impacts and local community efforts.

Environmental awareness and activism in other developing economies exhibit diverse trends influenced by socio-economic and cultural contexts. In China, a significant rise in environmental consciousness has been observed, with 75% of urban residents expressing concern about pollution and climate change, and 55% participating in activities like recycling and energy-saving measures (Zhang, 2020). In Indonesia, a study found that 60% of the population is aware of environmental issues, with 38% engaging in community-led initiatives such as beach clean-ups and mangrove restoration projects (Prasetyo & Firdaus, 2019). These trends indicate an increasing engagement with environmental issues, driven by government policies, educational campaigns, and the visible impact of environmental degradation on daily life.

In Mexico, environmental awareness has also seen growth, with 68% of adults recognizing the importance of environmental protection and 47% participating in activities like water conservation and waste management (Gonzalez & Perez, 2021). In South Africa, research shows that 63% of the population is environmentally aware, with 40% involved in activism, including protests against industrial pollution and campaigns for sustainable agriculture (Mkhize, 2020). These statistics reflect a burgeoning environmental movement in developing economies, where community involvement and government support play crucial roles in fostering sustainable practices.

Moving to Vietnam, environmental consciousness is also on the rise. Nguyen and Tran (2020) reported that 55% of the Vietnamese population is aware of environmental issues, driven by growing concerns over pollution and resource depletion. Approximately 30% of the population actively engages in environmental activities, including waste reduction campaigns and

conservation efforts. Government initiatives and NGO activities play pivotal roles in promoting environmental education and fostering sustainable practices among communities, aligning with Vietnam's development goals towards green growth and sustainable development.

In Argentina, environmental activism has gained momentum in response to pressing environmental challenges. According to Lopez and Martinez (2022), 68% of adults express concern over issues like deforestation, pollution, and climate change impacts. This heightened awareness has spurred significant activism, with half of the population participating in advocacy campaigns for environmental conservation and the adoption of renewable energy sources. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements play crucial roles in mobilizing public support and influencing policy changes aimed at mitigating environmental degradation and promoting ecological sustainability in Argentina.

In Egypt, environmental awareness has been steadily increasing over recent years. A study conducted by El-Gohary and El-Haggar (2021) revealed that 62% of urban residents are concerned about environmental issues such as pollution and water scarcity. This heightened awareness has translated into action, with 40% of the population actively participating in community-based initiatives such as neighborhood clean-ups and sustainable farming projects. These efforts are crucial in a country facing challenges from rapid urbanization and industrial growth, where environmental degradation poses significant threats to public health and natural resources.

In Tanzania, environmental awareness campaigns have led to 60% of the population recognizing the importance of conservation efforts, with 40% participating in initiatives like community-based reforestation and water resource management (Kapinga & Mushi, 2021). Similarly, in Nigeria, 55% of rural dwellers are aware of environmental issues, and 25% actively engage in activities aimed at combating deforestation and promoting renewable energy sources (Okeke & Nwadiuto, 2019). These statistics underscore the diverse approaches and increasing involvement of Sub-Saharan African communities in environmental sustainability efforts, driven by both local initiatives and global environmental movements.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, environmental awareness and activism are increasingly becoming prominent, albeit with unique challenges and opportunities. In Ghana, for instance, 58% of the population is aware of environmental issues, and 35% actively participate in activities such as tree planting and waste management initiatives (Amoah & Boakye-Yiadom, 2022). In Uganda, a study indicated that 52% of urban residents are environmentally conscious, with 30% engaging in activities like advocating for sustainable agricultural practices and wildlife conservation (Okello & Ochen, 2020). These figures highlight the growing recognition of environmental challenges and the proactive efforts of communities to address them, often supported by local NGOs and international collaborations.

Sub-Saharan economies are also experiencing a rise in environmental awareness and activism, though at varying levels across different countries. In Kenya, a study revealed that 55% of the population is aware of environmental issues, with 35% engaging in activities such as tree planting and anti-plastic campaigns (Wanjiku & Kamau, 2021). In Nigeria, research indicates that 50% of urban dwellers are environmentally conscious, and 30% are involved in initiatives like clean-up drives and advocacy against deforestation (Adebayo, 2020). These statistics reflect a growing environmental consciousness, often spurred by local NGOs and international support, highlighting

the importance of grassroots movements in promoting environmental sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In modern poetry, themes of nature and the environment often reflect contemporary perspectives on ecological issues. One prominent theme is the lamentation of environmental degradation and loss. Poets like Mary Oliver and Wendell Berry use their verses to mourn the destruction of natural landscapes and the extinction of species, invoking a sense of urgency and sorrow among readers (Smith, 2020). This theme resonates with heightened levels of environmental awareness among readers, prompting reflection and potentially inspiring activism to address ecological challenges. Another prevalent theme is the celebration of nature's beauty and resilience. Poets such as Joy Harjo and Robert Hass celebrate the intricacies of the natural world, highlighting its resilience in the face of human impact and climate change (Jones, 2019). This theme fosters a deep appreciation for nature and can motivate readers to engage in conservation efforts and sustainable practices.

Moreover, modern poetry often explores the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. Poets like Gary Snyder and Elizabeth Bradfield emphasize the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment, urging readers to recognize their role in preserving ecological balance (Brown, 2021). This theme aligns with efforts to raise environmental consciousness among readers, promoting a sense of responsibility towards environmental stewardship. Finally, poetry also engages with themes of environmental justice and activism. Poets such as Aimee Nezhukumatathil and Craig Santos Perez address environmental injustices, advocating for marginalized communities affected by pollution, climate change, and resource exploitation (Nguyen, 2022). These poetic expressions amplify voices of environmental activism, encouraging readers to advocate for equitable environmental policies and practices.

Problem Statement

In recent years, the intersection of ecocriticism and environmental awareness in modern poetry has become increasingly significant. Ecocriticism, as a literary theory, examines how literature engages with environmental issues and influences societal attitudes towards nature. However, despite the growing body of ecocritical scholarship, there remains a need to explore how contemporary poets articulate environmental concerns through their verse and how these poetic expressions impact readers' environmental awareness. For instance, poets like Joy Harjo and Wendell Berry offer poignant reflections on human-nature relationships and environmental degradation (Jones, 2019; Smith, 2020). Understanding the effectiveness of such poetic articulations in fostering environmental consciousness is crucial for evaluating the role of literature in shaping ecological discourse and motivating environmental activism among contemporary audiences.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocritical Theory

Originated from the environmental movement, ecocriticism examines how literature portrays and influences human relationships with the natural world. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of ecological and literary studies, exploring how texts convey environmental values, ethics, and ideologies. Ecocriticism is particularly relevant to the study of modern poetry as it provides a framework to analyze how poets like Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder articulate environmental concerns through poetic language, thereby fostering environmental awareness among readers (Garrard, 2018).

Cultural Ecology Theory

Developed by anthropologist Julian Steward, cultural ecology examines the dynamic interaction between human societies and their environments. It explores how cultural beliefs, practices, and narratives shape environmental perceptions and behaviors. Applied to modern poetry, cultural ecology theory allows researchers to analyze how poets portray human-nature relationships and environmental issues within cultural contexts. This perspective is crucial for understanding how poetic representations of nature contribute to shaping environmental awareness and activism in contemporary society (Soper, 2021).

Reader-Response Theory

Originated by Louise Rosenblatt, reader-response theory focuses on how readers interpret and respond to literary texts based on their own experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. In the context of ecocriticism and modern poetry, this theory allows researchers to explore how readers engage with poetic depictions of the environment and how these engagements contribute to their environmental consciousness. By analyzing reader responses to ecologically themed poems, researchers can assess the effectiveness of poetry in promoting environmental awareness and influencing readers' attitudes towards nature (Bleakley, 2022).

Empirical Review

Smith (2019) investigated the impact of ecologically themed poetry readings on audience perceptions and environmental awareness. Using qualitative methods, Smith analyzed participant responses to poetry readings focused on environmental themes, exploring how these readings influenced readers' understanding of ecological issues. The study found that exposure to environmental poetry heightened awareness of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change among readers. Participants expressed a deepened appreciation for nature's beauty and a heightened sense of urgency regarding environmental stewardship. Recommendations from the study included integrating more diverse ecological themes into educational curricula and public poetry events to foster environmental literacy and inspire sustainable actions among the general public.

Jones (2020) delved into the rhetorical strategies employed by contemporary poets such as Joy Harjo to convey environmental messages through poetry. Using discourse analysis, Jones examined how poetic language shapes reader attitudes towards nature and environmental issues. The study revealed that vivid imagery, metaphorical expressions, and narrative techniques play a crucial role in enhancing ecological resonance and shaping environmental consciousness among readers. Poets like Harjo use their verses not only to depict natural landscapes but also to evoke emotional responses that prompt readers to reflect deeply on humanity's relationship with the environment. The findings underscored the effectiveness of ecocritical poetry in influencing public perceptions and advocating for sustainable environmental practices. Recommendations emphasized the importance of using compelling language and narrative strategies in ecocritical poetry to effectively communicate environmental messages and inspire positive environmental actions.

Brown (2021) conducted a comparative thematic analysis of ecocritical themes in the works of prominent poets Wendell Berry and Mary Oliver. Through close reading and thematic analysis, Brown explored how these poets depict human-nature relationships and advocate for environmental stewardship in their poetry. Berry's works often emphasize the importance of

localism, sustainable agriculture, and a deep connection to the land, encouraging readers to embrace a responsible and sustainable lifestyle. In contrast, Oliver's poetry celebrates the resilience and beauty of nature while lamenting its vulnerability to human impact, prompting readers to reflect on the consequences of environmental degradation. The study highlighted the diversity of ecocritical perspectives within modern poetry and suggested that embracing multiple viewpoints enriches public discourse on environmental issues. Recommendations included promoting ecocritical poetry that addresses both local and global environmental concerns to foster broader public engagement and support for environmental conservation efforts.

Nguyen (2022) explored the effectiveness of ecopoetry in motivating environmental activism and fostering environmental awareness. Using a mixed-methods approach, Nguyen analyzed reader responses to ecologically themed poetry and examined how emotional engagement with poetic narratives influences environmental attitudes and behaviors. The study found that emotionally evocative poetry, which connects personal experiences with broader environmental issues, enhances reader empathy and encourages active participation in environmental advocacy. Readers expressed a heightened sense of responsibility towards environmental stewardship, indicating that ecopoetry has the potential to mobilize individuals and communities towards sustainable practices. Recommendations from the study included encouraging poets to emphasize personal connections to nature and environmental issues in their works to inspire meaningful environmental action and promote positive societal change.

Lopez (2019) investigated the cultural impact of ecocritical poetry in Latin America through ethnographic methods. Lopez explored how indigenous perspectives on nature are represented in contemporary poetry and analyzed the role of ecocritical discourse in shaping environmental attitudes within diverse cultural contexts. The study highlighted the significance of incorporating indigenous ecological knowledge systems into literary representations to promote cultural diversity and environmental justice. Lopez's findings underscored the potential of ecocritical poetry to amplify marginalized voices and advocate for environmental sustainability. Recommendations included fostering greater cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in ecocritical discourse, ensuring that diverse cultural narratives are represented in poetry collections and scholarly analyses to enrich global understanding of environmental issues.

Martinez (2020) studied the intersection of feminist theory and ecocriticism in the works of contemporary female poets. Through intersectional analysis, Martinez examined how gender influences environmental perspectives in poetry and explored how women poets contribute to ecocritical discourse. The study revealed that feminist ecocriticism offers a unique lens to analyze the interconnectedness of gender, nature, and environmental activism in poetic representations. Martinez's findings highlighted the importance of intersectional approaches in ecocritical scholarship to amplify marginalized voices and promote inclusive representations of environmental issues. Recommendations included supporting women poets who integrate feminist perspectives into their ecocritical works and advocating for diverse gender representations in environmental discourse to foster equitable and sustainable environmental practices.

Thompson (2018) conducted a longitudinal study on the reception of ecocritical poetry in mainstream media and its impact on public discourse. Using content analysis, Thompson tracked media coverage and public reactions to ecocritical themes in poetry over time, examining how media representation influences public perceptions of environmental issues. The study found that media engagement with ecocritical poetry significantly shapes public awareness and discourse on

environmental sustainability. Thompson's findings suggested that increased media representation of ecocritical perspectives could enhance public understanding of environmental challenges and promote broader support for sustainable environmental policies. Recommendations included advocating for more inclusive media coverage of ecocritical poetry to raise environmental literacy and stimulate meaningful public dialogue on environmental stewardship.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps

While these studies collectively underscore the efficacy of ecocritical poetry in fostering environmental awareness and activism, there remains a need for deeper exploration into how different poetic forms (e.g., haiku, free verse) influence reader perceptions of environmental issues. Smith (2019) and Nguyen (2022) focused on qualitative analyses of reader responses, suggesting a gap in quantitative studies that measure the long-term behavioral impact of ecocritical poetry on sustainable practices. Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind emotional engagement with ecopoetry, as highlighted by Nguyen (2022), could provide insights into effective messaging strategies for environmental advocacy.

Contextual Gaps

Brown (2021) and Lopez (2019) brought attention to cultural and indigenous perspectives within ecocritical poetry, emphasizing the need for more studies that explore how regional or local environmental concerns are represented in poetic narratives. There is a gap in research focusing on non-Western ecocritical poets and their contributions to global environmental discourse, which could enrich understanding of diverse ecological perspectives. Additionally, while Martinez (2020) examined gender and ecocriticism, there is scope for further intersectional analyses that explore how race, ethnicity, and socio-economic factors intersect with environmental themes in poetry.

Geographical Gaps

Thompson (2018) highlighted the influence of mainstream media on public perceptions of ecocritical poetry, primarily within Western contexts. There is a gap in research examining the reception and impact of ecocritical poetry in non-Western regions, where cultural and environmental contexts differ significantly. Studies that explore how ecocritical poetry is received and adapted in regions like Africa, Asia, and Latin America could provide valuable insights into global environmental consciousness and advocacy through literary expressions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of ecocriticism in modern poetry reveals its profound impact on raising environmental awareness and fostering a deeper connection between humanity and the natural

world. Through various poetic forms and rhetorical strategies, poets like Joy Harjo, Wendell Berry, and Mary Oliver vividly depict ecological issues, prompting readers to reflect on environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Studies by Smith (2019), Jones (2020), Brown (2021), Nguyen (2022), Lopez (2019), Martinez (2020), and Thompson (2018) collectively demonstrate that ecocritical poetry not only enhances public understanding of environmental challenges but also inspires proactive environmental stewardship.

Moreover, these studies highlight the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism, integrating insights from literary analysis, cultural studies, and environmental psychology. They emphasize the importance of diverse perspectives, including indigenous knowledge and feminist perspectives, in enriching global environmental discourse through poetic expression. Moving forward, addressing conceptual, contextual, and geographical gaps identified in current research will further strengthen the role of ecocritical poetry in advocating for sustainable practices worldwide. Ultimately, ecocriticism in modern poetry stands as a powerful tool for promoting environmental consciousness, encouraging readers to appreciate nature's beauty, and galvanizing collective action towards a more sustainable future. As poets continue to articulate environmental concerns through their craft, ecocritical discourse remains indispensable in shaping attitudes, policies, and public awareness on pressing ecological issues.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance ecocriticism in modern poetry, it is crucial to promote interdisciplinary approaches that bridge literary analysis with environmental psychology, cultural studies, and indigenous knowledge systems. Scholars should explore how poetic language, imagery, and narrative techniques influence environmental attitudes and behaviors. Jones (2020) demonstrated the power of discourse analysis in uncovering how poetic rhetoric shapes reader perceptions of nature and ecological issues. By embracing interdisciplinary frameworks, researchers can deepen theoretical insights into the nuanced ways poetry contributes to environmental consciousness, laying the groundwork for more comprehensive ecocritical theories.

Practice

In practice, promoting ecocritical poetry involves integrating it into educational curricula and public discourse. Smith (2019) highlighted the transformative impact of ecologically themed poetry readings on audience perceptions and environmental awareness. Educators should incorporate ecocritical poetry into school programs to cultivate environmental literacy from an early age. Additionally, supporting public poetry events that feature ecocritical themes can engage diverse communities in discussions about environmental stewardship and sustainability practices. This practical application of ecocritical poetry not only broadens its audience but also encourages meaningful reflections on humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Policy

Advocating for ecocritical poetry in policy involves influencing cultural and media practices to amplify environmental voices and perspectives. Thompson (2018) underscored the role of media in shaping public discourse on environmental issues through coverage of ecocritical themes in poetry. Policymakers should support initiatives that promote cultural diversity in literary

representations, ensuring ecocritical poetry reflects a wide range of cultural and ecological viewpoints. By fostering inclusive media coverage and public dialogue, policymakers can enhance public understanding of environmental challenges and advocate for policies that prioritize sustainability and ecological conservation.

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