

An Analysis of Children’s Poems in Environment and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation: A Participatory Approach, Catching Them Young.

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ABSTRACT

Children are very important stakeholders in the environmental discourse of climate change mitigation and adaptation for today and future developments. They need to participate in communicating their initiatives and raise awareness of climate change adaptation through available participatory initiatives and networks; thereby improving their own local conditions. The study employed predominantly qualitatively research methodology based on interpretive philosophy. This is informed by the theory of eco-criticism which argues that children’s literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship within children (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). Participatory methods formed the bedrock of this research as children were asked to participate in child friendly adaptation programmes, and then wrote poems on environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Documentary analysis through the approach of critical discourse analysis (cda) and eco-criticism were employed to unmask the hidden aspects of environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. A total of 12 poems were analysed, and the themes were environmental management, trees, waste management, the sun, flowers, water and air. Children were discovered to be at the heart of activities, recognizing that they are effective communicators of risk and drivers of change in their communities. Children were also trained in participatory poetry and documentation of climate change risks through poetry writing skills. It has been concluded that, children’s literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship within the children. In addition, in order to inculcate long lasting impression on environmental stewardship, it has been concluded that catching them young is the best method. Children should be put at the heart of activities, recognizing that they are effective communicators of risk and drivers of change in their communities.

KEY WORDS: Adaptation, Mitigation, Participatory, ethnography, stewardship

Date of Submission: 25 June 2014



Date of Publication: 15 July 2014

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Children are highly motivated to both adapt and mitigate to climate change, they are willing to take risks as well as prepared to lead community adaptation initiatives in their communities. While this is all true, children appear marginalized from the official decision making processes with regard to climate change. Climate change issues have been articulated from the perspectives of the adults without accommodating the children’s views, which are believed to be important in this current scenario.

The rights of children to participate in decisions relating to climate change issues need to be enhanced. Due to the vulnerability status of children against climate change, they need to be made a core part of community based initiatives. What ever role the children render in the communities that they live, it should be a child-centered approach anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Putting children at the heart of conservation activities, would be a way of acknowledging their participatory efforts through drama, games, reciting poetry and singing. Environmental conservation issues need to be articulated in line with MDG number 7 which focuses on ensuring ‘Environmental Sustainability’. In 2012, the International Conference on Community Based Adaptation, held in Vietnam, placed children at the focal point as ‘drivers of change.’ The conference adopted child participatory methodologies as alternatives to environmental conservation. In this view, these participatory methodologies include children taking lead in story telling and poetry writing.

This paper gives an overall background in poetry analysis, through critical discourse analysis (cda), with the hope of bringing clarity on hidden and underlying issues being highlighted in the selected children's poems. Advocating for a greater voice for children and young people in relevant decision making forms at local, national and international levels is a key to ensuring their needs are met and their capacities recognized and utilized (UNICEF, 2011). It starts from a child rights perspective to engage children to explore how these rights could be affected or made attainable by disaster and climate change impacts. Participatory poetry is another critical way of empowering children through appropriate child friendly methodologies that ensure the transfer of climate adaptation knowledge and skills. This realisation would also be able to make how children could participate in language usage in relationship with environmental degradation. In all these endeavours and realisations, the most important issue in this regard is sustainability that is the environmental sustainability fortified by linguistic sustainability (Bstadardas-Boada, 2005) Poetry in this view clearly brings out the relationship between language and ecology (eco-linguistics).

In recent years, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) has been busy working with school children in articulating environmental issues through debates and essay competitions. Poetry is vital in the sense that it can be recited, read aloud, sung and be documented along with the perspectives of children. There is also a lot of creativity when writing poetry which children need to harness and practice. This serves to promote the voices of children which is also similar to promoting sustainable development.

According to the perspectives of UNICEF, "the future we want" will be dependent on children being at the heart of environmental sustainability. This means that the progress of children can be a major driver of sustainable development, through participating in it and be part and parcel of it. This is because children are stakeholders in a sustainable world that is the ones with the most to gain and the most to lose from our failure as adults. It must all be pointed out that children should be viewed as major participants and contributors to a healthy and habitable planet. Adults should start looking at children and the young as the makers of a future sustainable world and measures of their progress will also be the makers of the world (Morgan, 2010).

Regarding children's total participation and involvement, there should be a direct link of what needs to be done for children today and how this will affect the future of their countries. For Zimbabwe, due to the fact that children have already been roped in as special stakeholders in the fight against climate change and other conservation issues, we are moving in the right direction as well as inclusive in our planning as a nation. This also means that any planning without the inclusion of children would always reveal planning gaps and missing links. Therefore, children are a vital cog in any greening efforts programmes and also that the stresses of climate change do disproportionately affect children. They are actually vulnerable to environmental pollution, as their bodies and brains are still actively developing.

The other good thing about it is that, investing in children delivers big pay-offs for their societies and the planet as a whole. "Environmentalism is a must to do for people from all walks of life" (Gitau 2011:305). Therefore, environmental stewardship should be a collective effort which must not leave the children out of this noble exercise. The concept of environmental morality need not be undermined as well. In this regard, this study, therefore seeks to demonstrate how children's literature or participatory poetry can be of overwhelming inclusive use to the communities of Zimbabwe, with specific reference to children's poetry within the context of environmental conservation.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Leaving out children and the youth in on going environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes continue to create eco-conscious, conservation and greening gaps in the fight against climate change. The MDG 7, "Environmental Sustainability" cannot be attained if planning continues to have participating children as the missing link. There has been lack of seriousness when inculcating the culture and spirit of conservation as this has been done at higher levels ignoring one of the most important stakeholders, the children.

III. OBJECTIVES

- I. To identify children as the major agents of environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- II. To explore the roles of selected poems from the chosen children in environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- III. To engage in a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the selected children's poems in environmental and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How can children be considered as major agents of environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation?
- ii. What are the roles of selected poems from the chosen children in environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes?
- iii. What is the children's voice or meaning behind the selected poems on environmental and climate change adaptation and mitigation?
- iv. How can the responsible authorities avoid planning gaps in their environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes?

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories that are critical to this study are eco-criticism and eco-linguistics. Eco-criticism is the study of literature and its relationship to the environment while eco-linguistics the study of the environment in relationship to language use. Glotfelty (1998) defines eco-criticism as, the study of the relationship between literature and the physical/natural environment. Eco-criticism also argues that children's literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship in children. Children represent approximately one-third of the world's populations, and their rights and participation as part of a sustainable future are already guided by an extensive range of international conventions, treaties and other legal instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2005). Children's voices and participation are critical sustainable future we all want. They are not only the inheritors of the planet but they actively shape it in its present form. This also means that inclusive and people-centered development means, investing in the well being and empowerment of children and young people so that they can become effective guardians of a sustainable world. Brockman (1998) stresses that an ecological base is highest in communities that have retained strong ties with land, have access to and opportunities to sustainable development programmes and use their local conservation knowledge in their homes and communities.

Eco-criticism has it that local people use experiential knowledge to acquire skills to adapt themselves to changes in their environments. As such, they know the terrain, the landscapes and sacred places and coping strategies in the event of hunger and disasters.

Grover (1988) defines poetry as, the work of creative art, verbal or written, carefully designed to express deep feelings and thought. In other words, poetic devices are a creative work of art designed to have a moving effect in order to evoke memories, mood, feelings, images and thoughts. Poetry in environmental advocacy can be found in the form of sound in songs, folklores, and nursery rhymes and it can be recited and sung. Poems thrive on the use of poetic devices like rhyme, rhythm and repetition to help bring out the power of carefully chosen language to concretize the object in a given situation. Poetry also makes use of comparatives and superlatives in order to communicate messages effectively.

Grover (1988) also highlights that choice of words by poets is called diction. Diction, in this regard is used to give a poem its character or tone. Some communicative functions of poetry as noted by Jakobson (1960) include to inform, to persuade, to influence, to change the attitudes of the readers and to empower them as well. Thus in analyzing the children's poems, attention was centered on establishing the communicative functions of poems. Grover (1988) points out that, the purpose of poetry is not primarily to convey information but to suggest mood and atmosphere, pictures and impressions, attitudes and emotions. In this view, because poetry largely appeals to the mind, it is the language of imagination. Poetry has three main characteristics. These are sense, sound and shape.

Poetry is described as a verbal art because it thrives on the use of style. Through the work of environmental poetry, readers are assisted in using words to convey impressions that will in turn recreate the experiences in their imaginations. The language of poetry seeks to open up the minds of people, create mental images and be able to relate those mental pictures to their present and past experiences.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study predominantly employed qualitative research methodology based on the interpretive philosophy. The methodology was also tailored to include community based co-design, which is grounded in a participatory action research paradigm and a dialogic design approach. This was informed by the theory of eco-criticism which argues that children's literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship with children (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996).

Methods

There are tools and methods for working with the children on climate change adaptation. Children engaged in interactive activities like poetry to help them familiarize themselves with critical and complex ideas related to climate change. Participatory methods formed the bedrock of this study as selected secondary school children were tasked to participate in child friendly adaptation programmes, and then wrote poems on critical environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. These children were drawn from Rio-Tinto secondary school, Njelele High and Cheziya High school in the Midlands province. Documentary analysis through the approaches of critical discourse analysis (cda) and eco-criticism were employed to unmask and clarify hidden aspects of environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Participatory methods proved to be ideal for active and effective participation, total involvement and ownership of conservation programmes by children.

Documentary Analysis

Hoepful (1997) asserts that another source of information that can be invaluable to qualitative researchers is document analysis. Document analysis involved exploring and analyzing documents on children's poetry in environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The researcher used a major approach of document analysis which is critical discourse analysis (cda) in analyzing children's poetry. The documents to be analysed were purposively sampled in order to stick to the theme as well as getting appropriate results.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

As noted by Dellinger (1995), Critical Discourse Analysis has made the study of language into an interdisciplinary tool used by scholars from a wide range of fields, such as anthropology, sociology, communication, social anthropology and linguistics. In other words, CDA aims to provide a better understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of the texts. Socially situated speakers and writers produce texts, just like what the school children did when they wrote poems in environmental conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The major objective of CDA was therefore to uncover the ideological assumptions hidden in the children's poetry. Fairclough (2000) reveals that CDA focuses mainly on the blind spots, which are the hidden meanings so as to make everything clear. Therefore, the sound knowledge of CDA makes it possible to unmask the different kinds of registers used in the children's poetry.

Critical discourse analysis and communicative functions of children's poetry

The data analysis follows this order:

- a) The role of children's poetry and poetic devices inherent in the selected children's poetry in environment and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- b) Communicative functions of the selected poems in environment and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- c) Ideological stand point represented by the selected children's poetry in environment and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Out of 30 (thirty) selected children's poems, a total of 6 poems were availed for analysis. Their themes were environmental management, trees, waste management, the sun, flower, air and water. The selected poems were 'worrying mother earth,' 'vegetation and environment,' 'mother nature,' 'waste management', 'trees,' 'trees,' and 'trees,'.

On the theme of Environmental Management, three poems entitled 'Worrying Mother Earth', 'Vegetation and Environment' and 'Mother Nature', were analyzed as follows:

'Worrying Mother Nature'

On this poem, the children are in bitter state of mind, they are complaining about the way nature, personified as the mother is being treated. This is quite a powerful poem, as justified by the two lines:

"You people why you destroy my children."

"They give you life but you destroy them."

A critical discourse analysis of these two lines reveals that, the earth, through being given immense human qualities, bearing all its belongings as 'children' (that include trees, rivers, forests, the air, its flowers as well as its people). All these natural wonders are described as 'my children.' This is indeed a wailing earth, worried about rampant and on-going destruction, losing its forests, air contaminated and rivers being polluted. On top of this, climate change is taking its toll, as a result children cannot continue to keep quiet because if they do, the earth will be no more and they their lives will be in extreme danger.

The other poem entitled '**Vegetation and Environment**' has the following stanza that is eye-catching:

"He gave us all eyes to see them"

"And lips that we might tell"

"How great is God almighty"

"Who has made all things well"

By being children, it doesn't mean that they cannot witness what is happening to vegetation and environment. Yes, they are children but they have eyes too and lips to tell. In their vulnerability status, they have conservation ideas too, they also care about the environment and they care about it too. According to (UNICEF, 2005), the works of children's poetry are publishable evidence, on the perspectives of children. There is also a strong connection between climate and the other challenges confronting the children. Children also made biblical allusion by making reference to the God almighty, meaning that they always have faith that no matter what happens to the environment, God is always present to make things right. Biblical allusion is a stylistic device meant to find solace and fortify hope in children experiencing problems and that they will keep fighting. Above all, the child-centered approach is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and as such, children should be put at the heart of activities recognizing that they are effective communicators of risk and drivers of change in their communities.

The other poem on environmental management is '**Mother Nature**.' Again reference is made to nature as the overall mother, because nature is productive, caring, loving, comforting and habitable. The following lines sum up everything:

"After land degradation, why can't you aforestate"
"Think of the three R's, Reuse, Recycle and Reduce"
"A friend of the environment will never damage his friend"

It is not a secret from the children's points of view that there is land degradation, it is highly visible and together, they have a solution, reuse, recycle and reduce. In this view, children are writing about the future that they want, which would depend on children being at the heart of environmental sustainability. Children's voices and participation are critical for the sustainable future we want. They are not only inheritors of the planet; they also actively shape it in the present for the future (Morgan, 2008).

The other two poems are on the theme of '**Waste Management**' and they both have the same titles. Their prominent lines and stanzas are as follows:

"They say prevention is better than cure"
"It has been said but when it comes to waste management..."
"It seems as if it has not yet been heard"
"They say reduce and yet we increase"
"They say reuse and yet we dump"
"They say recycle and as usual we do the opposite"

These two stanzas spell out the code and ethics of environmental management but as people, we tend to lack a very important communicative aspect, which is, instead of listening, we continue to hear. The gospel of environmental conservation is available everywhere, in the print media, electronic media, bill-boards and in all procedures and manuals but do not seem to take this noble intention seriously. This assertion is now coming from a very unlikely quarter, that is the children and the young are now leading advocates of the gospel of conservation to greater and higher levels, as strong advocates of the environment.

Inclusive and people-centered development means investing in the well-being and empowerment of children and young people so that they can become effective guardians of a sustainable world. These young children are showing us a commitment to share knowledge, coordinate activities and work with themselves as agents of change. As adults we are committed to effective protection and meaningful participation of children and young people in our changing climate. Children are not responsible for climate but they may ultimately be the ones suffering the most the most risk of not surviving as expected (Ulla-Tomaes, 2008).

Quite a number of poems from these children's project are centered on '**TREES**'. As such, trees are life, so they say. Quite a number of stanzas and lines are analyzed to unearth the meanings behind them, which would be used in environmental conservation. The following stanzas are a testimony of this:

"I was once as strong as brandy but now I am naked as the night"
"And shy because my friends laugh at me..."
"Why do you love hurting me so much?"
"I cry in pain from the scars you make every time you cut me"

In this view, the trees have taken upon themselves, as personified objects to mourn about the pain inflicted on them by human beings. The issue of nudity (nakedness) implies that as wounded trees, gnarled and scarred, they no longer have a sense of protection and decency. Anybody who is naked is defenseless, in a state of shame and vulnerability. No matter how we rejoice at stripping trees of everything of their possessions, their pain and scars will never heal.

When we talk of the environment, the first thing that comes into our minds is images of trees, trees and trees. Trees are indispensable in environmental sustainability and three quarters of human survival is centered on tree products. Any talk in environmental conservation, without mentioning trees, would be very much unsustainable. Trees are productive and they have replenished the earth, they are symbol of attraction and life. By writing about trees, the children are being encouraged to use their environment and climate change knowledge in creative and innovative ways to safeguard their future, to design and implement their own actions with the support they need and to take part fully in interventions initiated by adults. This requires a change in the attitude and commitment of stakeholders how to value what children and young people can do (UNICEF, 2008).

Another stanza from the other poem on 'Trees', which of course is worth mentioning, is the following one:

"What a beautiful creature I am, I make the environment look beautiful"
"Especially when my green leaves shoots, many people and other creatures love me"
"Because I provide shelter to them, I provide medicine, I help animals with food"
"I provide also many things especially to human beings..."
"Although they admire me, you will find them at the end misusing me"

Children, in their poetry, always use the style of personification in most of their poems. In the stanza above, the tree confirms its beauty and how people and animals love trees but they lack respect for it. Human beings are cited as chief culprits since they benefit more from trees and the environment but they continue to abuse the trees and the environment. A critical analysis revealed that since climate change is anthropogenic, it is the human hand or activity which is to blame for the deteriorating of the environment. Until and unless human beings change their behaviour towards nature, trees will continue to mourn about the endless damage being inflicted on them by the uncaring people.

The following stanza from another poem on 'trees' has quite exciting dimensions on how trees continue to get a raw deal of mismanaging the environment:

"I give you oxygen, fuel, medicine and fruits"
"But you make me cry, you cut me using sharp axes"
"You spray me with dangerous liquids but you will suffer if I decay"
"Give me food and water so that I will continue giving you fuel, oxygen and fruits"

Children, in their participatory poetry, have demonstrated that they actually know what is happening, as none of them has ever written showing happiness from trees. Instead, all of them are bitter, in pain, complaining, wailing and mourning their state of affairs. There is a sense of a somber atmosphere in their writings, that there is a fast degradation of the environment and the sooner people do something, the better. What the above stanza is articulating, are critical components of human life like fuel, medicine, food, water and oxygen. It is clear that human beings cannot live without the stated aspects but they continue to indiscriminately cut down trees for selfish gains.

VII. RESULTS

A total of 12 poems analysed were of environmental management, trees, waste management, the sun, flowers, water and air. Works of poetry and other written issues are publishable evidence on the perspectives of children. Children centred approaches are also enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children were discovered to be at the heart of activities, recognizing that they are effective communicators of risk and drivers of change in their communities. Children were also trained in participatory poetry and documentation of climate change risks through poetry writing skills. Children took the leading role of composing poetry from their own art of imaginations. Children's poetry formed the microcosm of environmental commentary and adjudication.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Children need to be recognized as capable analysers and communicators of risk, mobilisers of action, and implementers of learning. The importance of empowering children through documentation ensured the transfer of climate change adaptation and mitigation into comprehensive knowledge and life-long skills. Children's literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship in children. Children's literature also removes poeto-phobia that students often have when approaching poetry. The researchers can also conclude that poetry is bound to release the children's creative juices as they create poetry out of non-poetry. It has also been concluded that, catching them young is one of the best method.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Children should be put at the heart of activities, recognizing that they are effective communicators of risk and drivers of change in their communities.
- ii. Tools and methods for working with children on climate change adaptation and mitigation should be highly explored as they bring a new impetus in environmental conservation.
- iii. Young children need to be cultured into environmental activism, drawing their consciences to green movements in their communities and the country as a whole.
- iv. Environmental discourse should be integrated into all subjects of the school curriculum in order to catch the children young.

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