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Language, Identity, and the Environment: Indigenous Communication for Sustainability in Ghanaian Oral Traditions and Creative Media

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Abstract

Indigenous languages are instrumental in preserving ecological knowledge and promoting environmental sustainability through artistic and cultural expression. However, their contribution to environmental communication in Ghana remains understudied in the literature. This study provides an analysis of the ways in which language conveys environmental values through oral traditions, indigenous-language, films, songs, and contemporary environmental communication materials. The study adopted a qualitative research design and employed discourse-textual analysis to examine a purposively selected corpus textual and audiovisual artefacts. The corpus comprised three proverbs, two folktales, two traditional songs, three environmental documentaries, and four environmental communication materials, yielding a total of 14 textual and audiovisual artefacts. Data were analysed through manual thematic coding, while Critical Discourse Theory guided the

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interpretation of themes relating to Indigenous ecological knowledge, representations of nature, linguistic choices, and environmental communication. The findings indicated that indigenous languages constitute vital repositories of ecological knowledge, cultural values, and conservation practices. Furthermore, artistic forms such as proverbs, folktales, songs, documentaries, and environmental campaigns promote environmental stewardship through culturally resonant modes of communication. The analysis also revealed that the marginalisation of indigenous languages in formal environmental communication weakens community engagement and constrains the transmission of indigenous environmental knowledge. The study concludes that integrating indigenous languages into environmental education, the creative arts, and public communication can strengthen sustainability initiatives by making them more culturally responsive. These findings provide practical insights for policymakers, educators, environmental communicators, and cultural practitioners seeking to develop more inclusive and effective environmental communication strategies.

Introduction

The increasing urgency of climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and environmental degradation has prompted a global search for sustainable and inclusive approaches that integrate scientific knowledge with indigenous cultural practices. Recent scholarships in environmental communication, sociolinguistics, and sustainability studies suggest that effective conservation depends not only on technological innovation but also on culturally grounded knowledge systems and communication networks (Pretty, 2011). In this context, language emerges as a critical resource, serving not merely as a medium of communication but also as a repository of cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, and environmental values that have evolved through generations of interaction between communities and their natural environments (Maffi, 2005).

In many African societies, particularly in Ghana, indigenous languages play a central role in the transmission of ecological knowledge and the preservation of environmental ethics. Through oral traditions such as proverbs, folktales, songs, dirges, and ritual discourse, communities convey

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information about natural resources, biodiversity, agricultural practices, seasonal cycles, and collective responsibilities toward the environment (Agrawal, 1995; Owusu-Ansah, 1997). For example, the Akan proverb "Dua koro gye mframa a ebu" ("A single tree cannot withstand the wind") underscores the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility—principles that are equally applicable to environmental conservation and the sustainable management of natural resources. Such expressions demonstrate that indigenous languages transmit ecological knowledge through culturally meaningful forms of communication rather than solely through technical or scientific discourse.

Despite Ghana's rich linguistic diversity, English continues to dominate environmental policy, formal education, governmental communication, and much of the creative sector. While English facilitates national and international exchange, its predominance may constrain the transmission of indigenous ecological knowledge, as many culturally embedded concepts cannot be translated without a loss of social nuance and environmental significance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Agrawal, 1995). Consequently, environmental campaigns conducted primarily in English may fail to resonate fully with local communities, whose environmental beliefs and everyday practices are deeply rooted in indigenous languages and longstanding cultural traditions.

At the same time, the increasing marginalisation of indigenous languages poses a significant threat to both cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. As Fishman (1991) observes, language loss is closely associated with the erosion of cultural knowledge and traditional worldviews. In Ghana, the declining use of indigenous languages among younger generations may lead to the gradual disappearance of ecological knowledge embedded in oral traditions and artistic practices. Consequently, environmental initiatives that fail to account for local linguistic and cultural contexts may struggle to secure meaningful community participation, thereby undermining their long-term sustainability.

Creative and artistic expressions provide important avenues for preserving indigenous languages while simultaneously conveying environmental messages. Storytelling, indigenous-language films, documentaries, music, theatre, and performance integrate language with cultural symbolism, enabling them to educate, entertain, and shape public attitudes toward environmental stewardship. These artistic forms also bridge traditional knowledge systems and contemporary modes of communication, rendering environmental messages more accessible and culturally resonant for local audiences. As such, they constitute valuable resources for promoting environmental awareness while safeguarding Ghana's linguistic and cultural heritage.

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Although previous studies have examined indigenous ecological knowledge, environmental communication, language preservation, and artistic expression, these issues have often been addressed in isolation. There remains a paucity of research exploring how indigenous languages function simultaneously as cultural assets, artistic media, and channels of environmental communication in Ghana. Moreover, few studies have integrated oral traditions, indigenous-language films or documentaries, songs, and contemporary environmental communication materials within a unified analytical framework. This fragmentation has limited our understanding of the ways in which language mediates the relationship between culture, artistic expression, and sustainability.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how language functions as the principal medium through which artistic expression and cultural knowledge contribute to environmental sustainability in Ghana. Employing a qualitative discourse and textual analysis approach, the study examines selected proverbs, folktales, indigenous songs, documentaries, and environmental communication materials. Its objective is to demonstrate how indigenous languages preserve ecological knowledge, shape environmental values, and facilitate culturally responsive approaches to sustainable development. By bringing these diverse artistic and communicative forms within a single analytical framework, the study provides new empirical insights into the interrelationships among language, culture, environmental communication, and sustainability in multilingual societies.

2. Aim of the Study and Research Questions

This study seeks to examine how language serves as the primary vehicle through which artistic and cultural practices contribute to environmental sustainability in Ghana. Specifically, it explores the role of indigenous languages as repositories and transmitters of ecological knowledge through oral traditions and contemporary creative media and considers how both their use and marginalisation influence the communication of environmental messages. Furthermore, the study investigates how the incorporation of indigenous languages into artistic and cultural production can foster environmentally sustainable practices that are responsive to local cultural traditions and community needs.

Guided by these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do indigenous languages convey ecological knowledge through storytelling, performance, and other artistic traditions?

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2. In what ways do language choices in contemporary media influence the effectiveness of sustainability communication?
3. What challenges does the dominance of English pose for environmental communication in Ghana?
4. How can the use of indigenous languages enhance community participation and improve the cultural relevance of environmental communication initiatives?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Indigenous Languages, Oral Traditions, and Ecological Knowledge

The relationship between language, culture, and environmental sustainability has attracted increasing scholarly attention in the fields of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and environmental communication. Researchers have argued that language functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a living repository of cultural identity and ecological knowledge, shaped over generations through continuous interactions between communities and their natural environments (Maffi, 2005). Indigenous languages encode valuable information about biodiversity, seasonal patterns, land management practices, medicinal plants, and sustainable resource use, thereby serving as important resources for environmental conservation.

Within indigenous communities, ecological knowledge is primarily transmitted through oral traditions, including proverbs, folktales, songs, narratives, and ritual discourse. Agrawal (1995) argues that such knowledge systems are context-specific, experience-based, and sustained through cultural transmission rather than through formal written documentation. These systems reflect communities' long-term relationships with their environments and provide practical insights into sustainable resource management and ecological preservation.

Studies across Africa further demonstrate that indigenous knowledge systems contribute significantly to climate adaptation and the sustainable management of natural resources (Zvobgo et al., 2022). In Ghana, indigenous ecological knowledge embedded within oral traditions continues to influence community responses to environmental challenges and supports everyday practices of environmental stewardship (Asante et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of recognising indigenous languages and cultural practices as essential components of contemporary environmental sustainability efforts.

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Studies on Akan and Ga oral traditions further demonstrate the ways in which language communicates and reinforces ecological values. Proverbs employ environmental metaphors to convey ethical principles concerning human relationships with the natural world and the responsible management of resources (Obeng, 1996; Owusu-Ansah, 1997; Gyamera et al., 2025). Similarly, folktales and indigenous songs often portray nature as an active participant in human existence, thereby promoting collective responsibility and encouraging environmental stewardship.

Although these studies highlight the ecological significance of oral traditions, they have largely focused on documenting and preserving indigenous knowledge systems. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how these linguistic resources interact with contemporary artistic and media practices and how such interactions contribute to environmental sustainability. This gap points to the need for further investigation into the evolving role of indigenous languages across both traditional and modern forms of environmental communication.

3.2 Language, Power, and Environmental Communication

Scholars in environmental communication have increasingly recognised language as a critical factor influencing public engagement with sustainability initiatives. Although English continues to function as the dominant language in environmental policy, formal education, and much international environmental discourse, researchers have argued that the exclusive reliance on global languages may marginalise indigenous knowledge systems and limit meaningful community participation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). In practice, environmental concepts expressed through indigenous languages often contain culturally embedded meanings that cannot be fully captured through translation into English, and this loss of meaning can significantly affect the effectiveness of environmental communication.

Agrawal (1995) further argues that when knowledge is detached from its linguistic and cultural contexts, its relevance and practical value are diminished. Similarly, Hameso (1997) suggests that indigenous languages possess specialised environmental vocabularies that enable communities to describe local ecosystems, conservation practices, and environmental changes with a level of precision that dominant languages may not always provide. These linguistic resources reflect generations of interaction between communities and their environments and represent important tools for communicating ecological knowledge.

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However, although existing scholarship emphasises the importance of indigenous languages in environmental communication, much of the literature remains largely normative, advocating for the inclusion of local languages without sufficiently examining the processes through which environmental messages are constructed, negotiated, and circulated across different artistic and cultural platforms. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of the specific linguistic strategies through which indigenous languages contribute to environmental awareness and sustainability practices in contemporary Ghanaian society.

3.3 Artistic Expression, Media, and Environmental Sustainability

Creative arts have increasingly been recognised as significant platforms for communicating environmental knowledge and promoting sustainable behaviours. Forms of artistic expression such as storytelling, theatre, music, film, and visual arts provide culturally meaningful avenues through which environmental messages can be communicated to diverse audiences. Their effectiveness lies in their ability to integrate linguistic expression with cultural symbols, narratives, and shared everyday experiences, thereby making environmental issues more accessible and relatable.

Research indicates that artistic productions in indigenous languages enhance audience engagement because they reflect local cultural realities and strengthen community identity. Community storytelling, traditional performances, and indigenous-language films or documentaries, for instance, contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage while creating spaces for dialogue on environmental conservation. The emergence of digital media has expanded opportunities for documenting oral traditions, preserving endangered languages, and disseminating indigenous ecological knowledge to wider audiences.

Despite these developments, existing scholarships have often examined oral traditions, artistic expression, and environmental communication as distinct areas of inquiry. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how language simultaneously functions as a cultural resource, an artistic medium, and a practical tool for environmental communication. Indigenous-language documentaries and contemporary environmental campaigns remain underexplored as complementary platforms for communicating sustainability messages.

3.4 Methodological Trends in Previous Research

Methodologically, previous studies on language and environmental sustainability have employed a range of approaches, including ethnography, sociolinguistic fieldwork, discourse analysis, linguistic documentation, and case study research (Maffi, 2005; Agrawal, 1995). Research focusing on oral traditions has largely relied on ethnographic observation and qualitative documentation of proverbs, folktales, songs, and indigenous narratives, while studies of environmental communication have frequently examined policy documents, media discourse, and public awareness campaigns.

Although these approaches have generated valuable insights, relatively few studies have combined discourse analysis with textual analysis to examine multiple forms of artistic expression within a unified analytical framework. Similarly, limited research has explored the connections among oral literature, indigenous-language films, music, and environmental communication materials in order to understand how linguistic choices influence the transmission of ecological knowledge.

This methodological gap provides the rationale for the qualitative, discourse-analytical approach adopted in the present study. By examining diverse cultural and creative texts within a single framework, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language mediates the relationship between artistic expression, cultural knowledge, and environmental sustainability.

3.5 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that indigenous languages play a significant role in preserving ecological knowledge, oral traditions contribute to the transmission of environmental ethics, and artistic expressions enhance public engagement with sustainability issues. However, much of the existing scholarship has examined these areas independently rather than exploring the interconnected relationship among language, culture, artistic expression, and environmental sustainability. Previous studies have largely focused either on documenting indigenous ecological knowledge, analysing environmental communication practices, or examining artistic forms of cultural expression. Comparatively limited attention has been given to the intersection where these dimensions converge.

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Furthermore, earlier research has paid insufficient attention to the specific linguistic mechanisms through which environmental meanings are constructed and communicated across both traditional and contemporary artistic forms. There is also a shortage of comparative studies examining oral traditions, indigenous-language films, songs, and other environmental communication materials within a unified analytical framework, particularly in the Ghanaian context.

This study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a qualitative discourse and textual analytical approach to examine how indigenous languages operate across diverse artistic and communicative platforms to construct environmental meanings, preserve ecological knowledge, and promote environmental sustainability. By integrating these interconnected dimensions, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship among language, culture, environmental communication, and sustainability. It also contributes to broader discussions on culturally responsive approaches to environmental conservation in multilingual societies.

4. Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines Cultural Sustainability Theory and Critical Discourse Theory to examine both the cultural significance of language and the power relations that shape its role in environmental communication. These theoretical perspectives provide useful analytical tools for understanding the Ghanaian context, characterised by rich linguistic diversity, the historical influence of colonial language practices, evolving media landscapes, and contemporary sustainability debates.

Cultural Sustainability Theory argues that sustainable development requires the preservation of cultural traditions, values, identities, and knowledge systems alongside economic advancement and environmental protection. Within this perspective, language represents a fundamental cultural resource through which communities communicate, preserve heritage, transmit knowledge, and maintain shared understandings of the world. Indigenous languages contain ecological knowledge developed through generations of interaction and observation of specific environments.

Such knowledge encompasses understandings of biodiversity, land-use practices, seasonal patterns, resource management strategies, and culturally established principles governing human relationships with nature. When indigenous languages decline or lose their social status,

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the cultural and ecological knowledge embedded within linguistic forms—including proverbs, narratives, songs, and ritual expressions—may also be weakened or lost. Consequently, Cultural Sustainability Theory highlights the preservation of linguistic diversity as an essential component of both cultural continuity and environmentally sustainable development.

Cultural Sustainability Theory highlights the value of language and cultural resources in preserving collective identities and knowledge systems, while Critical Discourse Theory examines how language functions as a means through which social power, authority, and ideological positions are constructed and maintained. Drawing on Fairclough's (1995) conceptualisation, Critical Discourse Theory views language as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideological structures, and systems of knowledge are produced and reproduced.

From this perspective, the study examines how particular language forms acquire dominance through institutional, political, and media platforms, and how such dominance influences which knowledge systems are recognised as legitimate. The global prominence of English in environmental communication reflects broader historical and socio-political power relations that have positioned certain linguistic communities and forms of knowledge as more authoritative than others. Consequently, dominant discourses often determine whose environmental knowledge is validated and whose perspectives remain marginalised within public conversations.

Applied to the Ghanaian context, this perspective provides a framework for examining the position of indigenous languages as underrepresented resources within formal environmental discourse and creative production. Environmental communication conducted predominantly in English often privileges scientific and externally produced forms of knowledge, potentially overlooking locally generated understandings of ecological relationships and sustainability practices. This creates a gap between environmental policy and community-based practices, particularly where official approaches to sustainability do not adequately reflect indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge.

Critical Discourse Theory therefore enables this study to investigate the representation and use of indigenous languages in artistic and environmental communication practices, while examining how language choices influence cultural representation, knowledge production, and public participation. It provides insight into the ways linguistic decisions shape not only the communication of environmental messages but also the recognition and legitimacy of different knowledge systems.

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The integration of Cultural Sustainability Theory and Critical Discourse Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of language in environmental sustainability practices. While Cultural Sustainability Theory emphasises the importance of indigenous languages as carriers of cultural heritage and ecological knowledge, Critical Discourse Theory reveals the power structures that influence their visibility, legitimacy, and use in contemporary environmental discussions. Together, these perspectives position language as both a cultural resource for preserving environmental knowledge and a site where competing values, identities, and forms of authority are negotiated. This dual theoretical approach is essential for developing environmental communication strategies that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and capable of engaging diverse communities through artistic and creative practices.

5. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the relationship between language, culture, artistic expression, and environmental sustainability in Ghana. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret how environmental meanings are constructed and communicated through indigenous linguistic and cultural practices rather than to quantify relationships among variables. The study focuses on understanding how oral traditions and artistic expressions preserve indigenous ecological knowledge, shape environmental attitudes, and promote sustainable practices.

5.1. Research Design

The study employs qualitative discourse analysis and textual analysis as its primary analytical approaches. These methods enable an in-depth examination of the linguistic, symbolic, and cultural meanings embedded in oral traditions and contemporary artistic media. Discourse analysis facilitates the examination of how language functions within its socio-cultural context to construct environmental meanings, while textual analysis allows for a systematic interpretation of narratives, symbols, metaphors, and communicative strategies that represent environmental values and sustainability practices.

5.2 Corpus Selection and Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to select information-rich texts that explicitly communicate environmental knowledge through language and artistic expression. Purposive

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sampling was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to identify texts that best addressed the objectives of the study. The corpus comprised three proverbs, two folktales, two traditional songs, three environmental documentaries, and four environmental communication materials, yielding a total of 14 textual and audiovisual artefact

(The corpus is presented in Table 1 see appendix 1). The selected corpus spans both traditional oral heritage and contemporary media productions, thereby providing a comprehensive representation of how environmental knowledge is communicated across generations. The inclusion criteria required that each text explicitly address environmental conservation, natural resource management, ecological values, or sustainable human–environment relationships. Materials lacking clear environmental content or sufficient cultural relevance were excluded from the study.

5.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed a systematic qualitative interpretive procedure. Initially, all selected texts were read, viewed, and reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with their linguistic content, cultural contexts, and environmental messages. During this stage, preliminary observations were recorded through analytic memos.

The researchers subsequently conducted manual thematic coding of the corpus. Coding was undertaken independently by two members of the research team to enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis. The coding framework was developed inductively from repeated engagement with the texts while being informed by the study's research objectives and Critical Discourse Theory.

The coding process focused on identifying recurring patterns within five principal analytical categories:

- representations of nature and the environment;
- indigenous ecological knowledge and conservation practices;
- symbolic and metaphorical representations of environmental values;
- linguistic choices, including the use of indigenous languages and English; and
- communicative strategies employed to promote environmental awareness and sustainability.

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Following the initial coding, the researchers compared their coding outputs and discussed areas of agreement and disagreement. Coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, thereby enhancing intercoder reliability and ensuring consistency in the interpretation of the data. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes through an iterative process of comparison and refinement. The final themes formed the basis for interpreting how language and artistic expression contribute to environmental sustainability within Ghanaian socio-cultural contexts.

5.4 Analytical Framework

The interpretation of the findings was guided by Critical Discourse Theory (CDT). This framework enabled the researchers to examine how language, power, culture, and ideology interact to construct meanings about the environment. It further facilitated an understanding of how indigenous languages and artistic forms encode ecological knowledge, reinforce environmental ethics, and shape public perceptions of sustainability. The study therefore analysed not only the textual content but also the broader socio-cultural contexts in which the selected texts were produced, performed, and interpreted.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

This study did not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions. Consequently, ethical issues relating to participant recruitment, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were not applicable. Instead, the research relied exclusively on publicly available textual and audiovisual materials, including published proverb collections, folktale anthologies, indigenous films, documentaries, campaign materials, and archival recordings. Ethical considerations therefore centred on the responsible and lawful use of these materials. All textual and media sources were appropriately acknowledged and cited in accordance with academic conventions. The researchers respected copyright regulations by analysing only publicly available materials used for scholarly purposes and ensured that all interpretations faithfully represented the cultural meanings embedded in the original texts without distortion or misrepresentation.

6. Results

The qualitative discourse and textual analysis of the textual and audiovisual artefacts revealed four major themes: (1) Indigenous languages as repositories of ecological knowledge; (2) Oral

traditions as vehicles for environmental education; (3) Language choice and the effectiveness of environmental communication; and (4) Artistic and media platforms as contemporary channels for environmental sustainability. The findings presented below are organised according to these themes.

6.1 Indigenous Languages as Repositories of Ecological Knowledge

The analysis of the selected proverbs, folktales, and indigenous songs indicates that Ghanaian indigenous languages preserve and transmit ecological knowledge across generations. These data demonstrate how environmental ideas are embedded within culturally meaningful linguistic expressions. Similarly, the folktales *Abena and the Sacred Fish* and *The Hunter and the Sacred Forest* portray forests, wildlife, and natural resources as integral components of communal life, reinforcing values of environmental responsibility and respect for nature, in which nature is portrayed as a caring, life-giving entity. By portraying land and water as agents that act upon human lives, these proverbs illustrate a reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment, where environmental stewardship is embedded within social and moral obligations

Indigenous Ghanaian proverbs embody aesthetic language through metaphor, symbolism, and personification, transforming ecological knowledge into memorable expressions that guide human interaction with the environment. The indigenous songs analysed further illustrate how environmental conservation is embedded in cultural performance. Traditional Asafo songs and harvest festival songs communicate messages of collective responsibility, land stewardship, and environmental preservation through culturally familiar forms of expression.

Here are four proverbs and one Asafo song that formed part of the data for this study.

The proverbs

1. *Se wo were fi na wosankɔfa a, yenkyi* (It is not wrong to return for what you have forgotten)
2. *Dua koro gye mframa a ebu* (A single tree cannot withstand the wind)

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3. *Shikpon ni kɔɔ lɛ kɛ wɔ* (The earth that gives life carries us)
4. *Beni aafo naagbe tso lɛ, amoo naagbee loo lɛ nl abaawo naagbe faa lɛ mli muji lɛ wobaana akɛ akpeeshika* (when the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, the last river is polluted, we will realise that money cannot be eaten)

Our selected indigenous Ghanaian proverbs illustrate the aesthetic richness of traditional language while communicating values that support environmental stewardship and cultural continuity. The Akan proverb, "*Sɛ wo wɛrɛ fi na wosankɔfa a, yenkyi*" ("It is not wrong to return for what you have forgotten"), metaphorically encourages society to reclaim valuable indigenous knowledge, including traditional environmental practices that have sustained communities for generations. Similarly, "*Dua koro gye mframa a ebu*" ("A single tree cannot withstand the wind") employs the image of a tree to symbolise both communal solidarity and the ecological importance of forests, suggesting that survival depends on interconnectedness. The Ga proverb, "*Shikpon ni kɔɔ lɛ kɛ wɔ*" ("The earth that gives life carries us"), personifies the earth as a life-giving entity, emphasising humanity's dependence on and responsibility toward the natural environment. Likewise, "*Beni aafo naagbe tso lɛ, amoo naagbee loo lɛ, nl abaawo naagbe faa lɛ mli muji lɛ wobaana akɛ akpeeshika*" ("When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted, we will realise that money cannot be eaten") uses vivid imagery and parallelism to warn against environmental degradation and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Collectively, these proverbs demonstrate how figurative language, symbolism, and cultural wisdom are employed to transmit ecological ethics, preserve indigenous environmental knowledge, and encourage responsible stewardship of Ghana's natural heritage across generations.

Asafo**song**

Yɛn asaase yɛ yɛn nkwa,

Momma yɛnhwɛ do yiei,

Sɛ yɛsɛɛ no a,

Yɛn mba rennya baabi ntsena.

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English Translation:

Our land is our life,

Let us care for it well,

If we destroy it,

Our children will have nowhere to live.

The song employs simple and repetitive linguistic structures that make its environmental message memorable and suitable for communal performance. The possessive construction "yən asaase" (our land) establishes collective ownership and shared responsibility, while the inclusive imperative "Momma yenhwe do yiei" (Let us care for it well) functions as a direct call to environmental action.

The final line introduces future generations into the discourse by emphasizing the long-term consequences of environmental degradation. This future-oriented framing strengthens the moral obligation to conserve natural resources. Through communal singing during festivals, community gatherings, and traditional ceremonies, the song transforms environmental conservation from an abstract concept into a shared cultural practice, thereby reinforcing sustainable environmental behaviour within the community.

6.2 Oral Traditions as Vehicles for Environmental Education

Across the corpus, oral traditions consistently function as educational resources for transmitting indigenous environmental knowledge. Proverbs, folktales, and songs communicate lessons on cooperation, responsible resource use, and harmonious relationships between people and their natural environment.

The findings indicate that environmental knowledge is presented not as abstract information, but as moral and cultural guidance embedded within everyday communication and community traditions. This suggests that oral traditions remain relevant mechanisms for promoting environmental awareness despite increasing urbanisation and modernisation.

Below are two excerpts from folklore to demonstrate the strength of language use within our traditions in addressing pertinent issues in our communities.

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Excerpt 1.

- a. There lived a skilled hunter. He knew every trail, every hidden grove, and every animal's hiding place. His eyes were sharp, his hands steady, and his traps were clever. The villagers admired him
- b. But the hunter's heart was not always guided by wisdom. Over time, he grew greedy. He began to kill more animals than his family needed, taking every opportunity to increase his wealth and reputation.

a1. Tsã la, avatsɔla ɖeka nɔ agbe. Enya to sia to sia, atifodede siwo ame gedede menya o, kple lãwo fe dodokpɔfe siawo katã. Efe ŋku kpɔ nu nyuie, efe asi wɔa dɔ nyuie, eye efe lãbabiwo hã xɔ asi ŋuto. Dukɔa me nɔlawo katã bɔbɔe nɛ eye wowɔa bubu nɛ.

b1. Gake avatsɔla la fe dzi menɔ nunya fe mɔ dzi yesiaɣi o. Le yeyiɣi megbe la, avarice (dzimaxɔse) va ge de efe dzi me. Ede dzesii be yele lã gedede

c. A voice like rolling thunder spoke to him, reminding him that the forest was not his to take at will. Every animal, every tree, and every stream had its place, and by upsetting the balance, he endangered not only himself but the entire village.

c.1 Gbe ɖi abe dzigbedegbe ene kpe de enu, eye wòɖo ŋku edzi nɛ be, menye eya tɔe ave la nye be wòatsɔ le efaam si me o. Lã ɖesiaɖe, ati ɖesiaɖe, kple tɔsisi ɖesiaɖe nɔ kɔfe si dze me, eye esi wòwɔ nane si gblẽ ɖoɖo sia me ta la, ede edokui kple kɔfe blibo la katã fe agbe de afɔku me.*

Excerpt 2

Da.kor bi, na ɔye da kronkron. Abena kor baka mu kesaw nsu. Ber a ɔrehwehwɛ de obi bɔboa ma w'asoa nsukora no no, nam kɛse bi fii nsu no mu baa beboa no ma ɔsoae. Nam no kaa kyerɛ no de mma ɔnka dem asem no nkyere obiara. Na mbom Abena annyɛ sotsei. Abena kɔkaa dem esumasɛm no kyerɛ nkrɔfo. Nna nkrɔfo no kor asubɔnten no mu, keyii nam kɛse no a ɔboaa Abena no fii nsu no mu na wokum no. Dem ntsi, bosom a ɔwɔ asubɔnten no mu no twee Abena n'asowa na ɔtwoe n'aso dzen osiande wɛmbu da kronkron anaa so, w'endzi no nyim na ɔmaa wokum mpataa kronkron no. (plot summary)

d.1 Abena went to the river on a sacred day to fetch water. A fish from the river helped her lift her heavy water pot and asked her not to tell anyone. Abena later revealed the secret, and the

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villagers returned to the river and killed the helpful fish. The river deity punished Abena for disobeying the taboo and destroying the sacred fish. (Opoku Agyeman, 2016).

Excerpt 1 is a folklore from Eweland, and excerpt 2 is from Fanteland. Such stories remain artistic sources for addressing communal concerns. Both stories aim to conserve biodiversity. Natural resources must be preserved. These resources are, first of all, communal property. No individual or group of people must be allowed to use the collective resources greedily at will. Existing generations have a responsibility to protect nature for future generations. Man must learn to operate within limits. Sacred days and imposition of taboos help to keep man within his limits. This is because overfishing and killing protected species can destroy ecosystems, as portrayed in the two stories.

6.3 Language Choice and Environmental Communication

The analysis of the *Green Ghana Day* campaign materials, documentary productions on illegal mining, anti-plastic pollution campaigns, and climate change awareness campaigns indicates that language choice influences the accessibility and cultural relevance of environmental messages. Campaign materials that incorporated indigenous languages alongside English appeared to provide greater opportunities for communicating environmental concepts within local cultural contexts. Conversely, materials presented primarily in English emphasised scientific and policy-oriented information while offering fewer culturally embedded linguistic references.

The findings therefore suggest that multilingual environmental communication may improve public engagement by combining national communication objectives with locally meaningful linguistic resources. The joy news platforms like several media houses across the nation Ghana spearheaded the exposure to the devastation caused by illegal mining. The wanton quest for gold pushed individuals to engage in highly destructive activities such as digging in both small and main water bodies, erasing down forest reserves, and blasting mountains and sacred grooves.

Investigative documentaries and coverages carried poignant slogans and headline phrases to match the dept or gravity of the situation at hand. Examples are ;"Poison for Gold", "Destruction for gold", "Galamsey Economy" "illegal miners have destroyed 7,500 football pitches of forest reserve", were some of the headlines carried through major news bulletins and media programmes by all the major media house.Environmental consequences of illegal mining are overwhelming. Mercury pollution, the destruction of Ghana's forests, rivers, and farmlands

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through are a few of the effects of 'galamsey' or illegal mining activities. These documentaries formed part of the Joy News Hotline Documentaries/Special Reports aired between 2022 and 2024, many of which were produced by investigative journalists.

Alongside the "galamsey" fight is the Green Ghana Day campaign. The campaign aims at restoration. Activities embarked on these campaigns are geared toward reclaiming the lost forest and grooves. The materials used comprise official environmental communication produced by the Forestry Commission of Ghana and the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources between 2021 and 2024 are analysed as part of the data for this study. The corpus includes campaign posters, televised public service announcements, and social media campaigns disseminated in English and, in some instances, Akan. These materials promote nationwide participation in tree planting and environmental stewardship while addressing issues such as deforestation, degraded landscapes, illegal mining (galamsey), climate change, and biodiversity loss. Through persuasive slogans and public awareness messages such as "*Restore our lost forest cover*" and "*Plant trees in degraded forest reserves*," the campaign constructs environmental restoration as a shared national responsibility and encourages collective action towards sustainable environmental management.

For every Green Ghana Day, there is a theme to celebrate with. Some of the recurring official slogans include:

- **"Let's Go Planting!"**
- **"Mobilising for a Greener Future"** (2022 theme)
- **"Our Forests, Our Health"** (2023 theme)
- **"Growing for a Greener Tomorrow"** (2024 theme)

The television and radio promotions often included **Akan translations or code-switching** by presenters and public figures to reach wider audiences, especially on stations such as Adom TV, UTV, and Peace FM. These translations were not official slogans but localized renderings of the English campaign message.

Some natural Akan equivalents that were commonly heard in broadcasts include:

Official English

Let's Go Planting!
 Green Ghana Day

Natural Akan Translation

Momma yenkondua nnua! ("Let's go and plant trees!")
 Da a yɛhyɛ Ghana ma ɛyɛ ahabammono

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Official English

Mobilising for a Greener Future
 Our Forests, Our Health
 Growing for a Greener
 Tomorrow

Natural Akan Translation

Momma yɛmmaa mma Ghana ayɛ ahabammono ama daakye.
 Yɛn kwaɛɛ, yɛn apɔmuden.
 Momma yɛnyɛ adwuma nne na Ghana ayɛ ahabammono
 ɔkyena.

In both English and the Akan campaign expressions, there is a great element of persuasion. Example, the use of 'Lets' and the Akan equivalent '*Momma*'

6.4 Indigenous and Contemporary Media Platforms for Environmental Sustainability

Contemporary environmental documentaries and campaigns show how audiovisual media have become really important platforms, for communicating sustainability messages in Ghana. A compelling example is presented in the documentary "Green Zongo (2022)" which documents women in the Nima community of Accra who are converting unused urban areas into vegetable gardens, which is basically a very practical response to climate change. In the film, there are interviews done right in the community, and footage showing the everyday urban farming activities. Because of that, the documentary makes it clear that local knowledge, shared effort, and care for the environment can actually help strengthen climate resilience, not just in theory but in day-to-day reality.

Similarly, Ghana's anti-galamsey campaigns use multilingual posters documentaries and public service announcements that show polluted rivers, degraded forests, and mining locations that have been left behind. The intention is to push citizens to protect natural resources. When you look at these productions together, it becomes obvious that modern audiovisual platforms can safeguard local knowledge, while also carrying environmental communication to broader audiences through stories that fit the culture and through visual storytelling that is easy to grasp.

7. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that indigenous languages function not only as systems of communication but also as repositories of ecological knowledge and cultural memory. The analysis of proverbs, folktales, and indigenous songs confirms that environmental values are embedded within linguistic and cultural practices, supporting Maffi's (2005) argument that linguistic diversity and ecological knowledge are closely interconnected. The findings also

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reinforce Agrawal's (1995) view that indigenous knowledge is transmitted through culturally specific systems of communication rather than formal documentation.

The analysis further demonstrates that oral traditions continue to perform important educational functions in contemporary Ghanaian society. Although modern communication technologies have expanded access to environmental information, the corpus suggests that traditional linguistic forms remain culturally meaningful mechanisms for transmitting environmental ethics and encouraging responsible relationships with nature. This observation is consistent with earlier studies on Akan oral traditions, which argue that proverbs function not only as rhetorical devices but also as instruments of social regulation and moral instruction (Obeng, 1996; Owusu-Ansah, 1997).

Another important finding concerns language choice in environmental communication. The analysis suggests that multilingual communication, particularly the inclusion of indigenous languages alongside English, enhances the cultural relevance of environmental messages. This supports Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that language shapes cultural identity and influences how knowledge is understood and transmitted. While English facilitates wider dissemination of environmental information, indigenous languages provide culturally grounded concepts that resonate more effectively with local communities.

The analysis of indigenous-language films and environmental communication campaigns further illustrates that artistic media complement traditional oral forms in promoting environmental sustainability. By combining culturally familiar narratives with contemporary communication platforms, these artistic expressions extend the reach of environmental messages while preserving indigenous cultural knowledge. This finding demonstrates the continuing relevance of artistic communication in supporting sustainable development and community participation.

Overall, the study highlights the interconnected roles of language, culture, and artistic expression in environmental sustainability. Rather than treating indigenous knowledge and contemporary environmental communication as separate domains, the findings demonstrate that they operate most effectively when integrated. The study therefore supports culturally responsive environmental communication strategies that recognise indigenous languages as valuable resources for environmental education, community engagement, and sustainable development in multilingual societies.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how language functions as the primary medium through which artistic expression, cultural knowledge, and environmental sustainability intersect in Ghana. Through a qualitative discourse and textual analysis of fifteen purposively selected textual and audiovisual artefacts—including proverbs, folktales, indigenous songs, films, and environmental communication materials—the study demonstrated that indigenous languages are repositories of ecological knowledge and cultural values that support sustainable environmental practices.

The findings show that oral traditions and contemporary artistic media communicate environmental ethics through culturally grounded linguistic expressions that reinforce community responsibility towards nature. They further indicate that integrating indigenous languages into environmental campaigns and creative media enhances the cultural relevance and accessibility of sustainability messages, whereas exclusive reliance on English may reduce the effectiveness of environmental communication among local communities.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its integrated analysis of oral traditions, indigenous-language films, songs, and contemporary environmental communication materials within a single discourse-analytical framework. While previous studies have often examined indigenous ecological knowledge, environmental communication, or artistic expression separately, this study demonstrates how these domains intersect to promote culturally responsive approaches to environmental sustainability in Ghana.

8.1 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis was limited to a purposively selected corpus of fifteen textual and audiovisual artefacts and therefore does not represent all forms of indigenous environmental communication in Ghana. Second, the study focused exclusively on Ghana, limiting the generalisability of the findings to other multilingual contexts. Third, the study relied solely on discourse and textual analysis and did not include audience-based data such as interviews, focus group discussions, or surveys. Consequently, the findings explain how environmental meanings are constructed within the selected texts but do not assess how different audiences interpret or respond to these messages.

8.2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should extend this work by incorporating empirical audience-based studies to examine how different communities interpret and respond to environmental messages presented in indigenous languages and English. Comparative studies involving multiple Ghanaian languages and other African contexts would also provide broader insights into the relationship between language, culture, and environmental sustainability.

Further research may explore additional artistic genres, including theatre, digital storytelling, social media content, and community radio programmes, to examine how emerging communication platforms contribute to the preservation and dissemination of indigenous ecological knowledge. Longitudinal studies investigating the influence of indigenous-language environmental communication on behavioural change would also make a valuable contribution to the field.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Disclaimer Statement

This work is not part of a thesis submitted to a university for awards of any degree.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Author A: Investigation, Project administration, Conceptualisation, Writing – original draft.

Author B: Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology

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Appendix A. Corpus of Textual and Audiovisual Data Used for Analysis

No.	Text/Artifact	Language	Genre	Source	Year/Period
1	<i>Se wo were fi na wosankɔfa a, yenkyi</i> ("It is not wrong to return for what you have forgotten")	Akan (Twi)	Proverb	Yankah, <i>Bu Me Bé: Proverbs of the Akans</i>	Traditional
2	<i>Dua koro gye mframa a ebu</i> ("A single tree cannot withstand the wind")	Akan (Twi)	Proverb	<i>The Wisdom of the Akan People</i>	Traditional
3	<i>Shikpon ni kɔɔ le ke wɔ</i> ("The earth that gives life carries us")	Ga	Proverb	Bureau of Ghana Languages; Gyamera et al. (2025)	Traditional
4	<i>Abena and the Sacred Fish</i>	Akan	Folktale	Opoku-Agyeman (2016); Ghana Education Service Folktale Collection	Traditional
5	<i>The Hunter and the Sacred Forest</i>	Ewe	Folktale	Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana; Fabowale (2025)	Traditional
6	<i>Yen Asaase Ye Yen Nkwa</i>	Fante	Asafo song	Centre for National Culture Archives	Traditional
7	Harvest Festival Song	Ewe	Traditional song	Volta Regional Cultural	Traditional

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No.	Text/Artifact	Language	Genre	Source	Year/Period
	Promoting Environmental Conservation			Centre	
8	<i>The Burning Field</i>	Twi, Dagbani & English	Documentary	Justin Weinrich / Collective Eye Films	2019
9	<i>Green Zongo</i>	English & Ghanaian languages	Documentary	Ghana Film Authority	2022
10	Joy News Documentary on Illegal Mining (Galamsey)	English	Documentary	Joy News Documentary Series	2022–2024
11	"Let's Go Planting" Green Ghana Day Campaign Posters	English	Environmental campaign material	Forestry Commission of Ghana	2021–2024
12	Green Ghana Day Television and Social Media Campaigns	English/Akan	Public communication campaign	Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources	2021–2024
13	Anti-Plastic Pollution Campaign Posters	English	Environmental communication	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ghana	2020–2024
14	Climate Change Awareness Campaigns	English	Public service announcements	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)	2021–2025