



Eco-Identity in Children's Literature: Ben Okri's *'Every Leaf a Hallelujah'* through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework

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Abstract

With ecosystems facing unprecedented anthropocentric threats, it is crucial to empower children to develop an eco-identity. Such awareness stresses the need to equip children to become change agents in the fight to achieve an ecocentric future. Creating an ecocentric future entails providing opportunities for children to constructively process the environmental realities of the Anthropocene. This is achieved through children's literature, which serves as a formative medium for developing eco-awareness and equipping children as members of society to speak out for the environment. This study analyses how ecological narratives drive children's eco-identity and consciousness using Ben Okri's *'Every Leaf a Hallelujah'*. This study employs qualitative content analysis and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to explore how the various systems combine to shape children's eco-identity. The findings reveal that the text is a rich source of eco-literary narrative. It clearly frames the child not merely as a passive observer but an active participant in the collective responsibility towards ecological preservation. The findings demonstrate that children's literature can reimagine the human-nature relationships and affirm that children's literature can cultivate eco-identity, promote ecological awareness, and nurture an ecocentric generation.

Keywords: Eco-identity, Children's literature, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*, Eco-awareness



1 Introduction

Industrialisation and consumerism have exacerbated environmental crises, such as deforestation, climate change, global warming, and pollution. These stem from the consequences of an anthropocentric worldview that positions humans above nature (Buell, 2005; Davari, 2025; Ogedengbe & Adams, 2025). As a result, the ecosystem has continued to deplete and erode the bond between humans and nature. Doughty et al. (2025) describe this as the result of “ecocidal mindsets” that have driven the planet into “an abyss of destruction,” a reality that affects not only adults but also young people. To address this crisis, Doughty et al. (2025) suggest that adults and children must collaborate to challenge the “divisive and unproductive binaries” that separate humans from nature and children from adults (p. 3). In this light, children’s literature becomes a critical tool for reimagining relationships between humanity and the environment. Yet, Bradford (2003: p. 111) observes that many children’s stories are still shaped by “metanarratives of progress or development” and often end with apocalyptic visions of ecological collapse.

Despite this constraint, when global concerns about climate change are discussed, children are rarely granted such an opportunity to lend their voices. One might ask, what do children really have to offer in the fight to preserve the ecosystem? Scholars such as Carrington (2021, as cited in Doughty et al., 2025) respond that young people contribute far more than a “blah, blah, blah”. Their contribution, if heard, can be meaningful, much like Mangoshi in Ben Okri’s *Every Leaf a Hallelujah* (2021). There is, therefore, an urgent need for parents, educators, scholars and policy-makers to foster ecological consciousness in children. This consciousness develops when children are exposed to environmental stories, outdoor learning, and critical thinking. Doughty et al. (2025) and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al. (2020) emphasise that children’s literature and environmental crises often position children as sources of hope. Encouraging this hope requires creating opportunities for children to process the realities of the Anthropocene constructively and to envision ways to sustain life on our shared planet.

This study aims to contribute to the growing field of *ecolinguistics* by examining how children’s literature can serve as a medium for the creation of eco-identity. It also situates African children’s literature within global environmental discourse, illustrating how indigenous worldviews and storytelling can enrich children’s ecological thoughts (Kibera, 2021). By analysing *Every Leaf a Hallelujah* through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, this research provides a framework for understanding how children’s literature can cultivate eco-identity and be a transformative educational tool that nurtures the development of *eco-identity*.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this paper are to:

- i. analyse how Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems can be harnessed to shape a child’s eco-identity in Ben Okri’s *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*.
- ii. demonstrate how children’s literature can function as a pedagogical tool for fostering eco-identity and environmental awareness among young readers.



2 Literature Review

2.1 *Ecolinguistics and the Anthropocene*

This study aligns closely with **ecolinguistics**, a field that explores the relationship between language, humans and the environment by stressing how ecological identity and language use influence actions towards the environment (Ogedengbe et al., 2025). In supporting this view, Steffensen & Fill (2014) reinforced the view that ecolinguistics investigates how humans, whether as individuals, groups, or species, interact to exploit their environment using language. Language is central to ecolinguistics; without it, the investigation of the relationship between how individuals think and conceptualise the environment will be impossible. In this light, Alexander & Stibbe (2014) broaden this idea to view how discourses about the ecosystem can instantiate cultural values, beliefs and behaviours that can either sustain or harm ecological balance. Thus, ecolinguistics serves not only as a field but a critical framework for revealing how language can promote ecological consciousness, reshape destructive narratives, and foster more sustainable human–nature relationships.

The *Anthropocene* is characterised by human activities combined with climate change, which have become the dominant narratives that shape Earth's ecosystems (Crutzen, 2002; Ogedengbe & Adams, 2025). While adults have been primarily responsible for most environmental crises, children are among the most vulnerable victims. Although they possess the capacity to become change agents in the reimagining of human-nature relations (Nikolajeva, 2014). The idea of *eco-identity* represents an essential step in building an ecocentric generation that views nature not only as a resource to exploit but as a living system to nurture (Thomashow, 1995).

2.2 *Construction of Eco-Identity*

Eco-identity reflects one's attitude and behaviour towards nature-related issues within the natural environment (Lei, 2023; Clayton & Opatow, 2003). Thomashow (1995) explains it as the ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth, as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of themselves. When applied to children, it describes the process through which young readers cultivate a sense of environmental self-awareness by interacting with nature and ecological stories. Individuals, especially children, who see themselves as interdependent on nature are more likely to act in environmentally responsible ways, whereas those who view themselves as separate from nature tend to exploit it (Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Doughty et al., 2025). Stibbe (2015) reiterates that the 'stories we live by' are embedded in literature, media, and discourse to either sustain or harm the ecosystems. Consequently, children's eco-identity, thus, can be strengthened or weakened by external and internal influences, but when this identity is exposed to conflicting anthropocentric ideas, it is weakened or destroyed.

To understand eco-identity, the concept of ecosophy is key. According to Thomashow (1995), "each person's path to ecological identity reflects his or her cognitive, intuitive and affective perceptions of ecological relationships", which are the building blocks for ecosophy. Ecosophy is evident in language and actions, as language plays a crucial role in shaping beliefs and ideologies, especially those related to environmental protection (Ogedengbe & Adams, 2025; Ammeh et al., 2026). Gottschalk (2001) argues that our sense of who we are not only influences how we portray identity but also determines how we act in everyday life. This is what Nikolajeva (2014) terms "life-to-text and text-to-life" (p. 25). To help a child develop the right eco-identity



by combining awareness with their experiences, it is imperative, according to Stibbe (2015), that every member of society take “concrete steps necessary to achieve that vision”. One such way is through storytelling for children, which functions as an interactive bond to foster growth.

To reframe a child’s early awareness from fear into empathy or indifference into appreciation, the agents identified in Figure 1 are responsible for the development of eco-identity in children.



Figure 1: Agents responsible for eco-identity in children (Researchers’ idea

As Audley et al. (2020) observe, when teachers engage children in safe conversations about nature, it helps them cultivate compassion for non-human life, which is a basic aspect of eco-resilience. Society and the environment are not left out. Positive eco-literature further guides children to refocus their emotions, curiosity, and creativity in ways that can help them connect with the current climate crisis. In this way, these agents contribute significantly to the development of children’s ecocultural identity, as it nurtures their ability to see themselves as part of a broader ecological community rather than separate from or superior to it.

2.3 Children’s Literature and Eco-Identity

As a platform, eco-identity in children fosters a resilient sense of self built on ecological and cultural awareness (Gaard 2009). This resilience, according to Gaard, emerges from nurturing a relationship with nature alongside fostering empathy. However, children’s environmental literature often generalises its audience by assuming that all children share the exact ecological issue and resources to address climate challenges, while overlooking the diverse geographical



realities that shape their ecological understanding. Van der Beek & Lehmann (2022) agree, stating that such an issue is “a potential trap for children’s environmental literature which lies in its tendency to simplify the complex issue of climate change and to offer potential ways for fighting climate change which are not accessible to all readers”. (p. 143)

To achieve a long-term result to environmental degradation in children’s literature, there is a need to analyse and develop stories that can serve as educational tools for building children's eco-identity into actions, resilience, empathy, etc. To Stibbe, “the stories that underpin unequal and unsustainable societies and searches for inspirational forms of language that can help rebuild a kinder, more ecological world” are key. Children’s literature is a form of eco-pedagogy that seeks to develop ecological awareness and sustainable behaviour among young readers (Gaard, 2009; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020, & Doughty et al., 2025). According to Stibbe 2015, this awareness is the start to explore new “stories to live by to bring into being the kind of ecological society that they want to see”, especially in children. Similarly, Pelo (2009) opines that nurturing eco-identity involves giving children “a profound sense of place... inviting them to braid their identities together with the place where they live” (p. 124) to perceive themselves as connected to nature. This metaphor of “braiding identities” illustrates how personal the process of ecological learning can be. One that fosters a sense of belonging to their environment et al enables them to integrate their personal identities with the places where they live. To this end, Adewale and Fidelix (2025) add that when young readers understand these stories, they cultivate critical-thinking skills that help them see themselves as protectors of their world.

2.4 *Eco Identity in Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Ecological identity in Okri’s *Every Leaf a Hallelujah* (2021) is exemplified through ecological storytelling. The narrative centers on Mangoshi, a young girl who ventures into the forest in search of a healing leaf for her ailing mother. Her journey becomes a transformational one with a thoughtful understanding of the sacred relationship between man and the environment. As Fashal & Madhi (2022) observe, the stories that shape an individual’s experiences form the basis of their ecological identity, one that links the lessons of the past to the unfolding possibilities of the future and is revealed in the present. Okri uses symbols and imagery of nature to elevate the story beyond a moral fable, which transforms into an ecosophical reflection for Mangoshi. By positioning a child at the ecological center of his narrative, Okri heightens the child’s role as a guardian of the earth.

3 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory* to examine the development of eco-identity in Okri’s ‘Every Leaf a Hallelujah’. This model situates children as key characters in ecological development within a series of interrelated environmental systems, which Bronfenbrenner refers to as a “set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls. At the innermost level is the immediate setting in which the developing person is situated. This can be the home, the classroom, or, as often happens, for research purposes” (1979: p. 3). To Nabavi (2012), these structures “provide a detailed analysis of environmental influences... on developing person” and they include the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, and *chronosystem* as presented in Figure 2.



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Eco-Identity Development in Every Leaf a Hallelujah

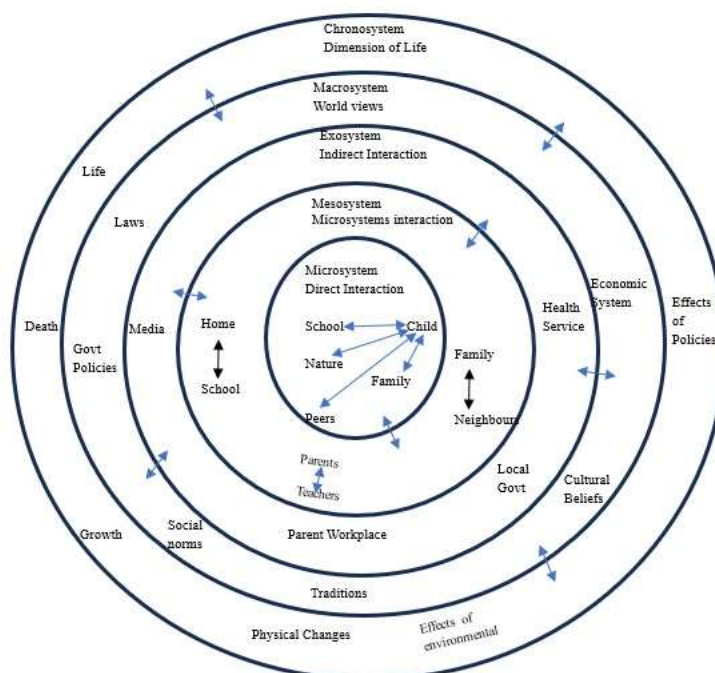


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1979)

Applying Bronfenbrenner's framework is particularly apt for this study because it mirrors ecological interdependence and "how environments change, and the implications of this change for the human beings who live and grow in these environments" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: p. 439). Just as this framework consists of interconnected systems, children's psychological development unfolds through reciprocal relationships with their environments. In *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*, these interactions manifest through Mangoshi's connection with her family, school, community, government policy and cultural heritage. The text, therefore, reflects the multilayered ecological and social systems that inform a child's understanding of the natural world.

4 Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach within the framework of Ecolinguistics. A qualitative content analysis, as explained by Preiser et al. (2021), "seeks to find and examine patterns of sense-making and meaning creation in the communicative characteristics of language". This approach is suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how eco-identity is constructed through linguistic resources, particularly in children's literature. Drawing on Okri's novel, lexical choices, descriptive expressions, evaluative language, representations of human-nature relationships, and other communicative features contribute to ecological meaning-making. Through this approach, the study investigates how literary discourse challenges anthropocentric views and promotes ecocentric values.



Source of Data

The source of data for this study consists of Okri's *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*, a children's text selected because of its explicit engagement with environmental concerns, ecological consciousness, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. The text provides a suitable context for examining how eco-identity is represented and developed within children's literature. As the sole source of data, the text serves as the basis for investigating the linguistic and narrative construction of ecological awareness.

Sampling Procedure

The study employs purposeful sampling to select data relevant to the research objectives. Following a repeated close reading of *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*, twenty-two excerpts were extracted based on their explicit representation of environmental values, relationships, stewardship, and interactions between the child protagonist and the natural environment. These excerpts constitute the primary data for the analysis because they provide rich illustrations of the processes through which eco-identity is constructed in the narrative.

Data Collection

The relevant excerpts collected which reflect ecological themes were highlighted, extracted and compiled into a data set for the analysis. The selection process focused on excerpts that contain linguistic and narrative elements that depict interactions among the child, society, and the environment, as well as those that contribute to the formation of ecological identities.

5 Data Analysis

The excerpts were subjected to qualitative content analysis using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as the analytical framework. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, linguistic and narrative features relevant to eco-identity construction were identified within each excerpt. These features include lexical choices, evaluative expressions, representations of environmental responsibility, and interaction between human and non-human entities.

Second, the excerpts were coded and classified according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems. This categorization enabled the study to examine how different ecological layers contribute to the development of eco-identity within the text.

Third, the coded excerpts were interpreted within an ecological framework to reveal the meaning, values and ideological assumptions embedded in the narrative. Particular attention was paid to how the text constructs eco-identity, promotes ecological awareness, and encourages environmentally responsible attitudes among young readers.

6 Results and Discussion

6.1 Microsystem: Eco-identity in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

At the **microsystem level**, the child's immediate environment comprises family, peers, school, and the natural environment. It helps to form the foundation for a child's social, emotional, and moral development. Within this system, interaction is **reciprocal**; that is, while a child is directly influenced by parents and the environment, the child in turn also shapes them.



Excerpt 1: *“Her parents were sad she had lost it, but were happier to have their daughter back home, safe and well. She ate her dinner and listened to a story her mother told her. It was the story of a hunter’s strange experience in the forest. The story was so fascinating that she fell into the story and found herself talking with the hunter and wandering about in the forest”.*

Excerpt 2: *“She went to school, and learnt many things, and came home, and helped her mother around the house”.*

Excerpt 3: *“Now I know what your secret is,” she said one day to her friend, the old baobab tree. “What is it?” “All the trees radiate love,” said Mangoshi, “and every leaf is a hallelujah”.*

Excerpt 4: *“But tell me, why is this tree your friend?” “He only wants to help us. He gives us air. All trees are our friends. They are good to us. Without them, we will die.”*

Excerpt 5: *“This tree is my friend,” Mangoshi said. The other children were charmed by this, and they looked at the old baobab tree with wonder. The tree looked at them too, but did not speak. It kept quiet and was happy that the little children played around it.”*

Table 1: Formation of Eco-Identity at the Microsystem level in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Excerpt	The Microsystem Level	Key Lexical Items	Formation of Eco-identity
1	The child interacts at home	“happier”, “back home”, “safe”, “well”, “ate”, “listen”	A peaceful and loving environment that provides for a child’s physical needs leads to the development of eco-identity.
2	The child’s interactions at school	“went to school”, “learnt”, “home”, “help”, “mother”	A sense of belonging builds a positive eco-identity.
3	The Child and Nature	“secret”, “her friend”, “trees radiate love”	A healthy relationship develops a good biocentric bond in a child.
4	The Child and Environment	“your friend”, “help us”, “gives”, “without them we die”	A child’s knowledge of the importance of the environment builds a confident eco-identity.
5	The child and Peers	“my friend”, “children played”	A child’s positive social awareness develops a joyful eco-identity.

Okri’s narrative presents Mangoshi’s eco-identity as emerging directly from her microsystem, illustrating that children’s ecological awareness begins with what they see, hear, and perceive in their immediate environment. In Table 1, Excerpt 1, the lexical items convey emotional security;



as Mangoshi “listens” to her mother’s story, she develops an imaginative frame that Bronfenbrenner terms a ‘developmental transaction’, an interaction that shapes thoughts and empathy. The “safe” atmosphere enables her to internalise the values of respect for nature. Excerpt 2 reinforces the point that daily interactions in learning at “school” and at “home” can stabilise environmental awareness. In Excerpt 3, this awareness extends into the relational realm, where Mangoshi’s interactions with “her friend” reflect an emerging biocentric connection and the awareness that “trees radiate love”. Excerpt 4 deepens this relationship with Mangoshi’s statement that “without them, we will die”. Her recognition in Excerpt 4 reflects her developed concept of ecosophy as the relationship between the self and the environment. As the other children observe Mangoshi’s relationship with the baobab tree, they also learn to appreciate the marvel of nature. In sum, Okri depicts children’s literature as a means to cultivate eco-identity.

6.2 Mesosystem: Eco-identity in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

At the Mesosystem, Bronfenbrenner connects the interactions of members of the microsystem, that is, the home, school, peers, and community, with how they relate to affect the child’s immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interaction reveals a network that links two or more microsystems.

Excerpt 6: *“My mother is ill. The village is sick. I have been sent to bring back a special flower that will heal my people.”*

Excerpt 7: *“There’s nothing we can do by ourselves. We talk to human beings, but they don’t hear us.”*

Excerpt 8: *“At an important meeting of the elders, this is what she said: The trees are guardians”.*

Excerpt 9: *“One last thing,” her father said, as he walked her to the edge of the village, “the most important thing you have to do is to let the earth guide you.”*

Excerpt 10: *“Human beings have not been good to the earth. But you will see.” He paused again. “The forest is not the same forest you went to before. If you get lost there, if it’s difficult to find your way back, there is only one thing to remember. If you bring back the flower, the flower will save the village. And if you save the village, the village will save the forest.”*

Table 2: Formation of Eco-Identity at the Mesosystem level in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Excerpt	The Mesosystem Level	Key Lexical Items	Formation of Eco-identity
6	The home/ community/environment interaction	“mother”, “the village”, “my people”, “sick”, “special flower”, “heal”,	The link between family, community and nature shows that the child’s knowledge of environmental care is tied to human survival.



7	Human-Nature Communication Breakdown	“nothing we can do”, “talk”, “human beings”, “don’t hear us”	Exposure to the disconnect between humans and nature fosters in the child an awareness of the need to respect the natural world.
8	Community Beliefs	“meeting”, “elders”, “trees”, “guardians	The exposure to the relationship with social authority and beliefs educates the child to see the environment as worthy of protection.
9	Family Guidance	“father”, “walked her”, “guide”, “earth”	The transfer of ecological values helps the child to depend on nature as a guide.
10	Community- Environment Reciprocity	“human beings”, “not been good”, “forest”, “save”, “village”, “flower”	The mutual dependence between man and nature, though severed, can be shaped by the child’s understanding of ecological roles.

As shown in Table 2, the model operates through the interconnected relationships among Mangoshi, her home, community, and the environment, revealing how ecological wisdom is transmitted through social constructs. The lexical items highlight interactions, breakdowns, restoration, and interrelationships among members within this domain. For example, the task of finding a “special flower” functions as a cultural metaphor for ecological restoration, implying that human healing is linked to the well-being of the earth. The lament in Excerpt 7 shows a breakdown in communication across the mesosystems. Yet this disruption becomes the task the protagonist seeks to restore. Excerpt 8 expands the mesosystem to include the “meeting of elders” and their recognition that “the trees are guardians”, positioning trees as a key cultural rubric of the society. Excerpts 9 and 10 illustrate the transfer of ecological values within the mesosystem. Her father’s advice, in Excerpt 9, extends parental teaching to include nature as a spiritual guide.

From (Excerpts 6-10) Okri constructs a web of influences where the mesosystem interact to form the foundation of a child’s ecological identity. Mangoshi’s journey is not just a child’s act of heroism but a way to encourage other children to respond to ecological self-awareness.

6.3 Exosystem: Eco-identity in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

In Ecological systems theory, the exosystemic level represents the *larger social structures* that indirectly affect a child’s life. The child has no direct participation but is largely influenced by the decisions, policies, or laws. Examples of such ‘social structures’ are: a parent’s workplace, effects of media, government laws, or the economic systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Excerpt 11: “*How can a tree be a friend? Do you know what we do with trees? We build houses with them, and furniture, and with some trees we make books. We have to do our work. Go home!*”



Excerpt 12: *“The manager offered the girl money, but she would not take any. He threatened her. He said he would call the police and have her taken away, but she was not afraid. “You are not going to kill my friend,” she said.*

Excerpt 13: *They had come in large numbers and they had even more machines and equipment. When Mangoshi saw them, her heart sank. “Be brave,” the eldest tree said to her. “Stand firm. Never show fear. You are small, but your very smallness is powerful.*

Excerpt 14: *“The world does not care,” the manager said. “They have all cut down their own forests. Where do you think we are sending the wood from these trees?”*

Excerpt 15: *“I am the governor of this state. We want you to stop work on this forest.” “But you ordered it,” the manager said. “Now we want you to stop,” the governor said. “The people are protesting about the forest. Stop all work for now.”*

Table 3: Formation of Eco-Identity at the Exosystem in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Excerpt	The Exosystem level	Key Lexical Items	Formation of Eco-identity
11	Economic systems for resource utilization	“we”, “build houses”, “furniture”, “books”, “work”, “trees”	Economic necessity has trivialized the essence of nature’s resources
12	Institutional Authority	“manager”, “offer”, “money”, “threatened”, “police”, “kill”	Institutional authority can interfere with or develop a child’s eco-identity.
13	Industrial System Intrusion	“machines”, “equipment”, “large numbers”, “powerful”	Large-scale industrial machines for environmental exploitation only expose a child to negative ideas.
14	Global Economic Discourse	“world”, “cut down”, “forests”, “sending the wood”	The system of global control of deforestation exposes the child to recognize widespread ecological harm.
15	Government Policies	“governor”, “stop work”, “ordered”, “protesting”	Demonstrates the role of policies in showing the child how environmental protection can be achieved through the right civic pressure.



As shown in Table 3, the formation of eco-identity in a child at this level is shaped through indirect exposure to social structures such as Economic systems, Excerpt 13; Global Economic/Political Discourse, Excerpt 14 and government policies, Excerpt 15. Excerpt 11 introduces the voice of exploitation in a rhetorical question. The worker's dismissal, "*We have to do our work*", reveals how economic necessity has trivialised the essence of nature's resources. Excerpt 12 also illustrates how authority can interfere with a child's ecological identity; the manager's threat to "*call the police*" reveals the backing received from the security agency to protect such an institution, and Mangoshi's refusal to be intimidated reveals her bravery in resisting institutional pressure. Excerpt 13 presents the power of members of this system to exert unwieldy power with the representation of "*large numbers*" and "*more machines*". In Excerpt 14, Okri introduces global systems as part of the exosystem. The manager's remark that "*The world does not care... They have all cut down their own forests,*" situates the local deforestation within global economic networks but exposes the consumer's culture beyond national boundaries as a form of environmental degradation. In Excerpt 15, Okri portrays the governor's order to halt deforestation under public pressure as the power of collective involvement to influence policy. Through this, Okri introduces global systems as part of the Exosystem to reveal that a child can develop an eco-identity grounded in awareness and understanding that environmental outcomes are influenced by larger systems of governance. From the lexical items, as shown in Table 3, the tensions between exploitation and protection position the child within a broader socio-political discourse where decisions are made beyond her control, yet it deeply affects her world

6.4 Macrosystem: Eco-identity in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Okri presents this level in the form of communal myths, unwritten codes and ritualised language about the forest. At this level, the wider cultural or social forces, such as cultural values and beliefs, ideologies, social norms, etc., indirectly affect the child.

Excerpt 16: "*Then the trees started weeping. It was a very solemn sound. It was as if a church were full of people and all the people in it were sad because something terrible had happened and they couldn't stop crying. Mangoshi was sad with them and began weeping as well.*"

Excerpt 17: "*...the wise man of the village said that only the special flower which lived in the heart of the forest could cure her, the same flower that Mangoshi had failed to bring back the year before.*"

Excerpt 18: "*Her parents realized that they had sent her too early last year and they should have consulted with the wise man before she set off*"

Excerpt 19: "*Mangoshi,*" he said, "*there is a special reason why we are allowing you to go. Only a girl of seven years old can find this flower. No one else can do it.*"

Table 4: Formation of Eco-Identity at the Macrosystem Interactions in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Excerpt	Macrosystem Level	Key Lexical Items	Formation of Eco-identity
16	Cultural Beliefs	“trees weeping”, “solemn”, “church”, “sad”, “crying”, “Mangoshi was sad”	Constructs nature as emotionally and spiritually alive, encouraging the child to view the environment as a sacred whole.
17	Myths/Traditions	“wise man”, “village”, “special flower”, “heart of the forest”, “cure”	Ecological knowledge within cultural authority teaches the child that nature heals and must be protected.
18	Cultural norms	“parents realized”, “consulted”, “wise man”, “before she set off”	Reinforces respect for traditional ecological systems that shape the child’s eco-identity through obedience to cultural practices and environmental values.
19	Communal belief	“special reason”, “girl of seven years”, “only...can find this flower”	An acceptable cultural narrative that values children’s innocence in nature positions the child as an active agent.

As presented in Table 4, Okri infuses the aspects of cultural beliefs, myths and tradition, norms to create a mental picture of the forest’s grief, the trees “weeping”, and the comparison to “a church... full of people” transforms environmental damage into a congregational suffering in Excerpt 16. Excerpt 17, Mangoshi’s eco-identity is shaped by grounding her experiences in the community’s shared beliefs and cultural expectations about nature as represented in “special flower” and the “heart of the forest”. The wise man’s statement that a special forest flower holds healing power reflects a cultural belief that nature is a living source of wisdom and medicine. This belief positions the forest as sacred. Also, Excerpt 18 shows how traditional beliefs guide decision-making; her parents’ regret highlights the social norms of seeking communal knowledge before engaging with nature. In Table 4, Excerpt 19, the belief that only a seven-year-old child can find the flower points to the cultural narrative that values children’s innocence in nature. This gives Mangoshi a sense of purpose within her community and helps her see herself as an active participant in ecological care. Through these, the macrosystem transmits respect for the natural world, encourages humility in the face of ecological wisdom, and shapes a child’s eco-identity by making environmental stewardship a core part of belonging to the community.



6.5. Chronosystem: Eco-identity in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

This level is related to the inevitable changes that affect a child's life over time, such as physical, societal, and historical changes.

Excerpt 20: *“Mangoshi knew it was time to go home. But before she left she said goodbye to her friend, the old baobab tree.”*

Excerpt 21: *“What is this place?” she asked. “This is a paradise of trees. Nothing dies here. Everything lives in simple joy,” said the old baobab.*

Excerpt 22: *“Mangoshi fell asleep while she wept. And in her dream, she saw that all the trees in the world had gone. The world seemed empty. Then the people, too, began to disappear.”*

Excerpt 23: *“But as time passed, she noticed small changes in their lives. The harvests grew poorer, and they had less to eat. Strange animals appeared in the village. It became very hot in the daytime. Then people began falling ill, and no one knew where the illness came from”.*

Table 5: Formation of Eco-Identity at the Chronosystem Interactions in *Every Leaf a Hallelujah*

Excerpt	Chronosystem level	Key Lexical Terms	Formation of Eco-identity
20	Temporal Transition	“time to go home”, “goodbye”, “old baobab tree”	The child’s evolving relationship with nature over time fosters emotional attachment.
21	Future Environmental Loss	“dream”, “trees...gone”, “world seemed empty”, “people...disappear”	Projects the consequences of ecological destruction by instilling the awareness that human survival depends on environmental preservation.
22	Gradual Environmental Change	“as time passed”, “small changes”, “harvests grew poorer”, “very hot”, “falling ill”	Demonstrates long-term environmental degradation and its impact on human life, helping the child to understand ecological processes.

As summarized in Table 5, a child develops eco-identity at this level by comprehending the evolving nature of time in Excerpt 20, the awareness of its importance in Excerpt 21, the projection of ecological destruction in Excerpt 22 and the long-term environmental degradation in Excerpt 23. All these expose the child to the fleeting changes in life. The lexical items such as “time to go home”, “people...disappear”, and “as time passed” highlight the transitions of events that link environmental conditions with human survival. These temporal markers help the child to develop eco-identity. Excerpt 22 portrays ecological harm as progressive rather than sudden,



resulting from long-term neglect of nature and human survival. At this level eco-identity is developed over time through special moments and memories that link the past, present and future.

7 Conclusion

This study analyses how literature can shape a child's eco-identity, using Mangoshi in Every Leaf a Hallelujah, through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. It examines eco-identity in children's literature through interactions across multiple systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. With literature as a tool, it further reveals that children's literature serves as a powerful means of fostering environmental consciousness, challenging anthropocentric narratives, and nurturing a positive eco-identity in children. Through storytelling and environmental exposure, the text offers a creative opportunity for children to learn empathy, responsibility, and ecological awareness. Literature, therefore, becomes both a mirror that reflects ecological values and a safe ground for children to practise them and respond positively to ecological challenges. The research contributes to ecolinguistics by integrating Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory with literary analysis, while offering practical implications for education and environmental awareness. However, its single-text study limits generalisability, suggesting the need for further comparative and empirical studies to deepen understanding of eco-identity formation.

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