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Extended Abstract

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Child, Family and Ecocentric Values in Iranian Picture Books: An Analysis of Three Picture Books *For the Polar Bears*, *Green Oak*, and *Roozbeh's Migration*

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Introduction

The intensification of climate and environmental crises we confront today are undeniably a direct result of humanity's instrumentalization of nature and our often-destructive practices. This anthropocentric perspective has led to the valuation of the natural world based solely on its utility to human existence. However, as climate challenges intensify, it is imperative to embrace alternative approaches, such as bio-centrism and eco-centrism, which assert that humans are not the center of existence and all entities —both organic and inorganic—possess intrinsic value. Attention to the critical climate situation has made the importance of providing eco-centric education to children more serious for a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the biosphere/ecosphere. Transitioning from anthropocentric values to eco-centric values demands a change in the type of learning and content to which children are exposed. Children's literature, particularly through picture books, plays a crucial role in instilling moral values,

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including a strong emphasis on environmental values. Due to the hybrid nature of picture books, this type of children's literature addresses and engages both children and adults at the same time, facilitating meaningful dialogue around the themes they explore. this is a valuable opportunity for learning. Given this context, our research explores the representation of the relationship between family, children, and the nature/ecosystem in three Iranian story-picture books. This investigation is conducted through the lens of eco-centric values, aiming to analyze the capacity of these works to foster learning opportunities related to ecological consciousness.

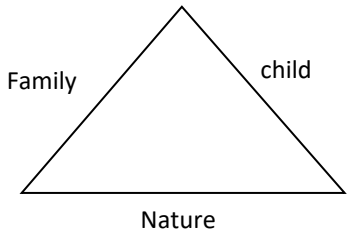
Methodology

This study aims to examine the relationship between family, child, and nature/ecosystem and how eco-centric values are represented by analyzing three Iranian fiction-picture books: *For the Polar Bears* (Tahouri, 2019), *Green Oak* (Mahdavi, 2020), and *Ruzbeh's migration* (Salehi, 2023). The selected samples were chosen from the list of recommended titles by the Children's Book Council focused on environmental themes, utilizing a purposive sampling method. The central themes within each of the selected books address environmental and natural concepts, highlighting the child's role within the familial context and their connection to nature.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of both the textual and visual content, this study utilized deductive qualitative content analysis alongside reflective analysis. The deductive analysis was anchored in the identification of eco-centric values, while the reflective analysis relies more on the researcher's decision to rely on her intuition and discernment in analyzing the data, based on her reflection and discernment, we examined various aspects of the child-family-nature relationship and eco-centric values in this relationship.

Discussion

In all three stories, the child-family-nature relationship was investigated in a three-way relationship and displayed in the form of a triangle.



In *For the Polar Bears*, the consumerism of the family, their lack of attention to nature and even the lack of attention to Golnar, the daughter of the family, is depicted and, in a way, represents the dominance of anthropocentric values in parents. On the other hand, Golnar pays attention to polar bears (the symbol of

nature in this story) and turns off lamps and electrical appliances because of them. In the three-way relationship, the family is absent, but the child and nature are connected and eco-centric values are respected by them.

In *Green Oak*, too, the father of the family is not only indifferent to nature but also hunts the squirrels with an instrumentalized perspective, which are the friends of the child in the story, that is, Zhivan. Zhivan's bond with the squirrels is such that when he learns of his father's hunting of them, he leaves his father to live with the squirrels. This action by Zhivan and his absence from father causes eco-oriented values to revive in his father, causing him to stop hunting and act as a conservationist in the oak forests, the habitat of squirrels. At first, the father has the role of harming nature and even his child in the three-way relationship, but with the action of Zhivan, the child in the story, the family's relationship with nature is restored.

In *Ruzbeh's migration*, the three-way relationship between child-family-nature is fully depicted based on eco-centric values. The story begins with Rouzbeh and his relationship with the surrounding nature, and then continues with a show of the family's relationship with the natural world and the entanglement of tribal culture with nature and respect for the inherent values of nature in their daily life. In all its stories and images, the perspective of the ecosphere is evident in the family's relationship with nature, and the obviousness of the eco-centric relationship with the natural world in the nomadic family and on their migration path, helps the child to experience this style of belonging, to be able to establish a correct relationship with nature based on inherent values, even on a small and childlike scale.

Conclusion

The analysis of the representation of the relationships among family, child, and nature within three selected works reveals a nuanced interaction between child characters and their environments, each depicted through distinct contexts: Golnar at home, Zhivan in the oak forests, and Ruzbeh on the migration path and the natural world of the nomadic family, and illustrated in an entangled relationship with the natural world, and act depending on the circumstances in which they find themselves. Embracing the entanglement of children and nature leads us to a conceptual shift towards "learning with" various forms of life in our shared everyday environments that emphasizing non-hierarchical relationships, holds potential for redefining environmental education. Children's literature, particularly picture books, offers an artistic and aesthetic platform for this mode of learning. In the works reviewed, learning with polar bears, with squirrels, and with lynx and fawns reflects this type of learning for the child audience. Examining the relationship between child-family-nature in the samples analyzed shows that in *Ruzbeh's migration*, this three-way relationship is stronger than in the other two works due to the deep-rooted attention to eco-centric values in the family. The family’s indifference to nature in *For the Polar Bears* and the family’s confrontation with nature in *Green Oak* led the child to act independently of the family. From the perspective of eco-centric value representation, the narrative centered around the green oak offers significant insights into the child's valuation process.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Climate crises, Ecosphere, Child's being-in-the-world, Learn-with.

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