

Eco-multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Novo Amor's Birthplace and the Reception of College Students: A Basis for Environmental Literacy Development

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Abstract. Environmental campaigns increasingly depend on multimodal design to make ecological crises visible, felt, and discussable, yet their pedagogical effects do not always match the persuasive force of such texts. This study examined Novo Amor's Birthplace as an eco-multimodal campaign text and asked how its visual, compositional, and ecolinguistic resources construct meanings of marine pollution, and how multilingual Filipino undergraduates interpret those resources. Using a qualitative sequential explanatory design, the study first conducted an eco-multimodal critical discourse analysis of the video. Then it analyzed 84 written reflections from undergraduate students using reflexive thematic analysis. The results show that the video stages a clear reversal of agency: the human figure initially appears as an intruding colonizer of the ocean floor, but gradually becomes passive, enclosed, and vulnerable. Its interactional choices narrow distance and intensify emotional pressure, while compositional arrangements assign salience to waste, darkness, and the large-scale plastic whale. From an ecolinguistic perspective, the campaign works through metaphor, discursive erasure, and a powerful reallocation of agency that frames pollution as a living ecological threat. Student receptions largely aligned with the textual analysis, especially in reading arrogance, irony, and ecological reversal, but several respondents also resisted the ending because it seemed to imply that nature heals only through human disappearance. The study concludes that Birthplace is rhetorically strong but pedagogically double-edged: it can deepen ecological awareness, yet it also risks eco-fatalism if left unframed. The paper argues for classroom use that combines close multimodal reading with localized sustainability action, especially in relation to SDGs 4, 12, and 14.

Introduction

Environmental communication has moved far beyond the printed poster or the policy brief. Contemporary campaigns now circulate as music videos, short-form digital narratives, visual essays, and platform-native clips that compress ecological urgency into images, sound, pacing, and symbolic design. Such multimodal forms matter because ecological crises are often too abstract, too dispersed, or too numerically dense to persuade through exposition alone. Visual and auditory design can act as a bridge between distant environmental statistics and the lived affective world of audiences, especially when campaigns attempt to link planetary degradation with local action. Recent scholarship on multimodality has shown that meaning is never carried by language alone; it is distributed across framing, gaze, composition, sound, movement, and the material arrangement of images and words (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Ledin & Machin, 2019). Within environmental communication, this distributed meaning is especially consequential because the crisis is not simply reported, but staged, moralized, and emotionally mediated.

The present study is situated within this shift in environmental persuasion. Novo Amor's Birthplace is not a conventional documentary on marine pollution. Yet, it has been widely read as an eco-critical text because it stages underwater imagery, plastic accumulation, and bodily vulnerability in a way that invites ecological interpretation. The video is significant for discourse analysis because it does not merely describe pollution; it dramatizes a collapse of the boundary between human

action and marine consequence. In ecological terms, this makes the text a rich site for examining how environmental harm is represented as a story of agency, loss, and eventual reversal. In pedagogical terms, it also offers an opportunity to ask whether students read the campaign as an invitation to action or as an aestheticized scene of inevitable destruction.

A substantial body of literature now supports the use of multimodal and ecolinguistic approaches for examining environmental texts. Work on multimodal discourse in applied settings shows that textual, visual, and interactional choices jointly shape meaning in educational and professional communication (Alyousef, 2016; Bower & Hedberg, 2010; Kang & Kim, 2022). Multimodal discourse studies have established that representational structures show what is depicted, interactional structures shape the relation between text and viewer, and compositional structures organize salience, information value, and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Ecolinguistics extends critical discourse work by asking whether texts sustain destructive or life-enhancing stories, and by attending to the linguistic and semiotic patterns through which nature is positioned as a resource, backdrop, victim, or partner (Stibbe, 2014; Penz & Fill, 2022). Recent work in environmental and sustainability discourse shows that texts often rely on visual and verbal strategies that either naturalize harm or invite more responsible ecological subjectivities (Jaworska, 2018; Norton & Hulme, 2019; Fernández-Vázquez & Sancho-Rodríguez, 2020; Laurie & Thompson, 2025; Ruggiero & Bachiller, 2023; Smeuninx et al., 2020).

That literature, however, leaves an important gap. Much of the existing research privileges corporate reports, news editorials, or policy documents, while fewer studies examine how artistic environmental campaigns are interpreted by multilingual students in classroom settings. Even fewer studies combine detailed textual analysis with reception data to compare what a campaign seems to mean with what viewers actually make of it. This is a serious gap because campaigns may be analytically powerful yet pedagogically unstable. A text can communicate ecological alarm effectively at the level of design and still produce ambiguity, resistance, or fatalism among learners. In a multilingual classroom, that gap can widen further because students draw on multiple linguistic and cultural repertoires when describing what they see, meaning that meaning-making is both semiotic and translanguaging.

Accordingly, this study asks a more focused question: how does a Western-produced eco-media text construct meaning of marine pollution through multimodal and ecolinguistic resources, and how do multilingual Filipino undergraduates interpret those resources when the text is used in an academic setting? The problem matters for at least three reasons. First, the Philippines remains one of the countries most exposed to marine plastic pollution, so environmental narratives about oceans are not abstract for Filipino learners. Second, university classrooms increasingly use sustainability media as teaching materials, yet teachers often assume that strong visuals automatically generate ecological awareness. Third, the existing literature has not sufficiently connected close multimodal reading with students' actual reception, especially in settings where students can critique, resist, or reframe the message in local terms.

This concern aligns with broader scholarship on environmental communication and education. Positive discourse analysis can help identify narratives that neither deny the crisis nor foreclose constructive ecological futures (Ponton, 2022), and broader sustainability-report research shows the value of comparing textual claims with actual communicative effects (Székely & vom Brocke, 2017). In classroom settings, environmental learning is strongest when students do not merely receive a message but actively decode how the message works. For this reason, the present study treats reception not as a secondary response but as part of the text's meaning.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical anchoring is drawn from social semiotics and ecolinguistics. Social semiotics provides the descriptive tools for examining representational, interactional, and compositional meaning. Ecolinguistics provides the critical lens for reading how the text organizes agency, metaphor, and discursive positioning. Read together, these frameworks allow the study to move from surface description to ecological interpretation: what is shown, how the viewer is positioned, what values are naturalized, and which stories of human-nature relations are made available. The study also uses positive discourse analysis to consider not only what is damaging in the text but also what is constructive or potentially teachable. The study assumes that the campaign presents semiotic cues, that viewers process those cues through cultural memory, language repertoire, and classroom context, and that the resulting receptions may align with, diverge from, or extend the analyst's interpretation in unexpected directions. That sequence matters because ecological communication is not complete at the point of production; it becomes socially consequential only when audiences read it, challenge it, and connect it to local problems. For this reason, the study keeps the text and the audience in view simultaneously instead of treating them as separate objects.

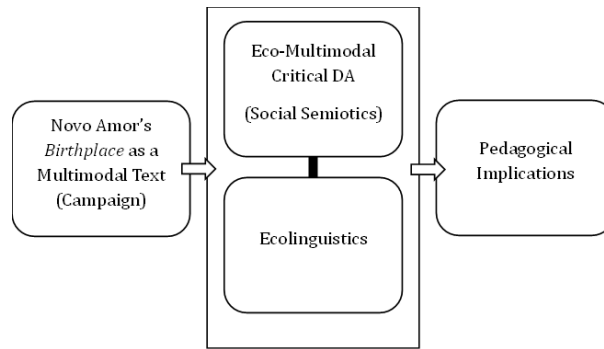


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Research Problems

How are ecological meanings and the crisis of marine pollution constructed in Birthplace through representational, interactional, and compositional resources?

How do these resources work together with agency, metaphor, and discursive strategies to build ecological significance?

How do multilingual undergraduate students in the Philippines interpret the video, and where do their readings align with or diverge from the textual analysis?

Assumptions of the Study

The study assumes that the video can be treated as a stable multimodal text for close analysis, even though viewers may read it differently. It also assumes that the student responses gathered immediately after viewing reflect first-order interpretations rather than rehearsed institutional answers. In addition, it assumes that multilingual students are capable of critical ecological reading, not as a deficit group but as interpreters whose language resources may widen, rather than limit, their insight. Finally, it assumes that the educational value of the campaign can be evaluated only when textual meaning is examined alongside reception rather than in isolation. Taken together, the study seeks to contribute to environmental communication research, multimodal discourse studies, and sustainability pedagogy. It does so by showing how a visually striking ecological campaign works, what meanings it stabilizes, where it becomes ambiguous, and how students in a Philippine classroom negotiate that ambiguity. The article proceeds by presenting the methodological design, then the results of the multimodal and reception analyses, followed by a discussion of implications, recommendations, and limitations.

Methodology

Research design

The study employed a qualitative sequential explanatory design. The first phase focused on the text itself through eco-multimodal critical discourse analysis, while the second phase examined audience reception through reflexive thematic analysis of student reflections. This design was chosen because the research problem required two kinds of evidence: how the campaign constructs ecological meaning, and how that meaning is actually taken up in a multilingual classroom. A purely textual study would have stopped at interpretation. In contrast, a purely reception-based study would have lacked the close semiotic account needed to explain why students read the text in particular ways.

Research locale

The research locale was a Philippine higher education institution offering a General Education communication course for undergraduate students. The site was appropriate because it represents a multilingual learning environment in which students routinely draw on English, Filipino, and other linguistic repertoires in classroom discussion and written reflection. The setting also matters politically and ecologically: the Philippines experiences recurring coastal and marine environmental pressures, so ocean-centered media texts are likely to resonate with learners not only as aesthetic objects but as social and civic concerns. The classroom context offered a credible site for examining ecological reception under realistic instructional conditions.

Research respondents and sources of data

The research respondents were 84 multilingual undergraduate students enrolled in the course during the semester in which the study was conducted. Purposive sampling was used because the study required participants who could meaningfully respond to an English-language visual text and provide written reflections in a classroom environment. The respondents were not selected to represent a statistical population; they were selected because they were the relevant interpretive community for the pedagogical question at hand. The primary source of data was the Birthplace music video itself. No other campaign text was analyzed, and no external dataset was used, because the aim was to conduct a focused microanalysis of a single environmentally charged multimodal text.

Research instrument

The research instrument consisted of a frame-based viewing guide using the theoretical frameworks and a structured reflection sheet. The viewing guide helped segment the video into key scenes, enabling consistent tracing of textual analysis across representational, interactional, and compositional layers. Appendix A presents the reflection prompts used in the classroom. The instrument was intentionally simple to elicit immediate interpretation rather than force students toward a predetermined theoretical answer.

Data gathering procedure

The data gathering procedure followed a consistent sequence. First, the students viewed the video in class without interruption so that the campaign could be received as a continuous narrative. Second, the instructor briefly guided students' attention to key frames to ensure they noticed the major visual transitions without overexplaining the text. Third, respondents wrote short reflections immediately after viewing. This timing was important because it reduced the chance that delayed reflection or outside discussion would overwrite the students' first impressions. Fourth, the researcher compiled and coded the reflections together with the scene-based notes from the video analysis.

Data analysis

The textual phase proceeded by identifying keyframes where the video shifted in narrative direction, visual density, or emotional emphasis. Each keyframe was examined for representational patterns, such as who is doing what and to whom; interactional patterns, such as distance, gaze, and angle; and compositional patterns, such as salience, placement, and contrast. These observations were then interpreted through ecolinguistic categories, especially agency, metaphor, and discursive erasure. The coding process was iterative rather than mechanical because the video's meaning depends on the accumulation of scenes rather than on isolated frames alone. The reception phase used reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in the students' written responses. Initial descriptive codes were first assigned to phrases indicating arrogance, contamination, irony, sadness, helplessness, or resistance. These were then grouped into broader themes based on conceptual similarity and interpretive weight. The analytic goal was not to count how often a word appeared but to trace how students made sense of the campaign's ecological argument. Because the reflections were short, thematic saturation was interpreted cautiously, in relation to the richness of the interpretations rather than solely by frequency.

Ethical considerations

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation between the textual coding and the reception data. The study also used prolonged engagement with the video and repeated reading of student responses to avoid overinterpreting isolated lines. Ethical considerations were observed through informed classroom participation, anonymization of written reflections, and careful handling of student texts to ensure that no personally identifiable information appeared in the article. Since the research used a single video and brief in-class reflections, the study did not claim broad generalizability. Its value lies instead in the clarity with which it shows how one eco-media text can work in one local pedagogical context.

Results and Discussion

Ecological meaning construction

The opening scenes establish a visual contradiction that immediately frames the ecological problem. Rather than presenting the human figure as a swimmer or visitor, the video places him upright on the ocean floor. That choice matters because it unsettles the ordinary logic of underwater movement and turns the body into an intrusion. In representational terms, the figure is not simply located in the marine environment; he is staged as if he has claimed a place that does not belong to him.

The result is a visual grammar of overreach, as though the human body is testing the limits of its own entitlement to the sea.

As the narrative unfolds, that initial dominance is progressively withdrawn. The body becomes suspended, then passive, then physically overwhelmed. By the time the figure assumes a fetal posture within the expanding plastic mass, the campaign has reversed the usual hierarchy between humans and the environment. The human actor is no longer the one who acts upon the ocean. He becomes the one acted upon. This reversal is central to the video's ecological meaning because it transforms pollution from a distant external threat into a force that absorbs, encloses, and finally neutralizes human agency.



Figure 2. Representational construction of intrusion and ecological reversal

This pattern of reversal is not limited to the visible body. It also appears in the transition from motion to stillness. Early movement suggests confidence and exploration, but later motion becomes constrained. Finally, the body appears almost weightless, as if biological life has surrendered to the material environment it helped create. The representational strategy works by stages rather than by a single image: it first gives human presence a sense of power, then withdraws that power, and finally recasts the human as ecologically vulnerable. That progression allows the campaign to turn agency itself into a moral argument.

The effect is not simply punitive. It also frames ecological harm as self-generating. The human figure does not encounter an unrelated monster; he is swallowed by the outcome of his own material culture. The result is an ecological allegory in which consumption returns as a consequence. In that sense, the representational resources create a warning that is at once concrete and symbolic. The sea is not just a setting. It becomes the space where human exceptionalism is exposed as fragile.

Representational resources and agency

The video's interactional design narrows the viewer's emotional and perceptual distance as the narrative unfolds. The opening frames are relatively open, allowing the marine environment to appear expansive and navigable. Later shots move closer, enclosing both the viewer and the human figure inside a more claustrophobic field of vision. These narrowing matters because it changes the kind of relation the audience is invited to have with the text. At first, the scene can be observed from a safer distance. Later, it becomes difficult to remain detached from the unfolding ecological pressure.

The camera angle and gaze patterns reinforce that pressure. Instead of maintaining a neutral observational stance, the video repeatedly positions the viewer to witness discomfort, loss, and remorse. The gaze of the human figure shifts from exploratory to defensively stunned, and eventually to a more direct expression of helplessness. This interactional movement does not offer an easy invitation to identification. Rather, it asks the audience to occupy a conflicted position: to feel the beauty of the image while also confronting the violence of the message. That tension is one reason the video can be read as persuasive, but also emotionally destabilizing.



Figure 3. Interactive immersion and affective discomfort

A further interactional resource lies in the way the text withholds explicit explanation. The video does not narrate its own symbolism in a direct didactic voice. Instead, it trusts framing, pacing, and gaze to do the work of persuasion. The absence of overt explanation gives viewers room to interpret the campaign critically, but it also increases the risk that some viewers will experience the ending only as spectacle. In this respect, interaction is not merely about visual closeness. It is about whether the text invites reflective engagement or passive consumption. Birthplace largely succeeds in the former, although not without ambiguity.

Compositional resources and metaphor

Compositionally, the campaign organizes meaning through contrast, salience, and progressive visual depletion. The beginning is marked by color, openness, and lively marine movement. As the narrative advances, dark space begins to dominate, while the plastic whale becomes the most salient object in the frame. The viewer's attention is progressively pulled away from ordinary sea life and toward the unnatural scale of waste. This is not an accidental aesthetic choice. The composition insists that pollution has become the center of visual gravity, not a peripheral blemish on an otherwise healthy ecosystem.

The compositional logic also creates a metaphor of contamination that exceeds literal representation. Waste is not shown as a static heap; it is animated into a predatory, organism-like presence. The plastic whale does not behave like trash. It behaves like an ecological body with appetite and force. That transformation makes the video function as a visual metaphor for how human consumption mutates into an environment of its own. The sea is no longer merely surrounded by waste. It is reorganized by waste, and the waste itself acquires the semiotic energy of life.

Discursive erasure is another important strategy. The opening beauty of coral, rays, and marine stillness is gradually removed from the visual field. Their disappearance is not simply a matter of narrative progression. It is a discursive statement about loss. By erasing what should have remained visible, the campaign visualizes the way ecological destruction often operates in public discourse: by pushing nonhuman life to the margins until it is absent from the story altogether. This absence gives the text its critical force, making the viewer feel what the ocean can no longer fully display.



Figure 4. Compositional salience and visual reversal

Ecolinguistic interpretation and discursive erasure

The ecolinguistic significance of these choices lies in the redistribution of agency. The video begins by coding the human as active, perhaps even masterful, and ends by coding him as subject to the material consequences of his own actions. That reallocation of agency is strengthened by metaphor. Human-made plastic is not presented as inert debris; it is reconceived as a living threat, a kind of ecological counterforce. Discursively, this means the campaign rejects the comforting story that pollution is manageable as a technical residue. Instead, it presents pollution as part of the ocean's ontology.



Figure 4. Agency reversal, metaphor, and discursive erasure

Student receptions

The reception data showed that the students were not passive receivers of the campaign's message. Their reflections demonstrated that they could decode the video's ecological argument, but they did so in ways that were often sharper and more locally grounded than the text itself—the first strong theme concerned human arrogance. Many students described the walking-on-the-ocean-floor sequence as territorial, invasive, or colonial in tone. In their reading, the body did not simply appear unusual. It symbolized a human claim over a place that should not be claimed. This response closely aligns with the analysis of representational agency and confirms that viewers readily noticed the video's anti-anthropocentric turn student 14 answered: "Seeing him walk on the ocean floor felt wrong, like he was claiming territory that wasn't his. It felt like a colonization of the sea."

A second theme centered on the irony of the fetal position. The reversal from confidence to helplessness struck students, and many interpreted the final posture as a moral consequence rather than a random visual twist. For them, the ending did not merely show destruction. It dramatized the collapse of human control. Several responses framed the plastic whale as an emblem of human-made objects returning against their maker. This reading is significant because it suggests that the campaign's metaphor was legible across the multilingual classroom. The students were able to move from image to ecological inference without needing extensive theoretical prompting. This is connected with what student 42 wrote: "Ang funny lang na makita siyang naglalakad na para bang sa kanya yung ocean. He started with so much power, but ended up in a fetal position inside the plastic whale. It shows that our own creations will eventually swallow us whole" [It is just funny to see him walking under water as if he owns the ocean...].

The most critical theme emerged around the ending. Although many respondents appreciated the visual beauty of the final restoration scene, several resisted the implication that the ocean heals only after human disappearance. They read the conclusion as emotionally powerful but ethically incomplete. Their objection was not to ecological recovery itself; rather, it was to the absence of a practical human role in that recovery. This is an important reception finding because it shows that students do not simply accept the campaign's implied moral. They evaluate whether the message leaves room for agency, responsibility, and action. This is highly noticeable in what student 76 thought: "The ending suggests that the only way for the ocean to survive is for humanity to die. While visually beautiful, it leaves us with no practical solution other than our own extinction."

Alignment and divergence between text and reception

Taken together, the student responses show both alignment and friction. The learners accepted the campaign's critique of arrogance and waste, yet its fatalistic closure unsettled them. This dual response indicates that the text succeeded in making ecological damage visible, but less securely in making ecological hope actionable. The students became co-interpreters who validated the campaign's warning while also questioning its endpoint. In pedagogical terms, that is useful because it shows that a visually strong text can still be opened to critical discussion rather than treated as self-explanatory.

Discussion

The results can be read at three levels of interpretation. At the descriptive level, *Birthplace* frames the ocean as a space where the human body appears visibly out of place. At the interpretive level, that staging turns pollution into an ecological reversal in which human agency is returned to its consequences. At the critical level, the findings confirm and extend earlier work on multimodality and ecolinguistics: they confirm Kress and van Leeuwen's account that composition and gaze structure meaning, and they support Stibbe's view that discourse can either naturalize or challenge harmful human-nature relations, while also extending Ponton's positive discourse perspective by showing that a text can remain pedagogically valuable even when its ending is ethically unresolved. This layered reading makes the campaign useful for classroom discussion because it moves from what is shown, to what it means, to what prior literature helps us understand about that meaning.

The interactional choices deepen this effect. The progressive narrowing of distance, the move toward enclosing frames, and the increasingly remorseful gaze work together to produce discomfort rather than detached admiration. This is not a neutral aesthetic achievement. It is a designed pressure that compels viewers to feel the ecological cost of what they are watching. This finding reveals that the semiotic resources can be persuasive without becoming informationally explicit. Yet the same strategy also risks leaving audiences with emotion but not direction, which is why pedagogical framing becomes crucial.

The compositional and metaphorical structure of the text carries the most consequential implication. By turning plastic waste into a visually dominant, organism-like force, the campaign invites audiences to see pollution as something that has entered the life of the sea. This does more than dramatize scale. It suggests permanence. Human waste is not shown as removable residue but as a new ecological condition. This reveals that environmental damage is not only cumulative; it can become semiotically normalized through repeated visibility. The campaign resists that normalization by making the viewer confront a world in which the ocean has already been materially transformed.

The student receptions sharpen the discussion by showing that viewers accepted the anti-anthropocentric warning but hesitated at the ending. Their resistance to the final restoration scene matters for two reasons. First, it confirms that the campaign does not fully resolve its own ethical problem. The text seems to suggest that nature heals only after humans disappear, and this implication is difficult to reconcile with sustainability education, which depends on human responsibility rather than human erasure. Second, it reveals that students are capable of evaluating ecological texts not only for meaning but for moral adequacy. That is a stronger form of ecological literacy than simple comprehension.

This dynamic underscores clear pedagogical implications. In classrooms, *Birthplace* should not be presented as a finished environmental lesson. It should be treated as a problem text, one that opens discussion about responsibility, waste systems, consumption habits, and local marine vulnerability. A teacher can use the imagery to build a discussion around SDG 14 on life below water, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 4 on quality education for sustainable development. The educational goal is not to let students stop at aesthetic appreciation, but to move them toward localized action and civic reasoning.

The multilingual character of the student responses is equally important. The reflections showed that students could express ecological judgment through a range of linguistic resources, suggesting that environmental interpretation is not confined to standardized academic English. In practical terms, this means sustainability education should welcome translanguaging and local explanation rather than treating multilingual expression as a barrier. Consequently, it becomes apparent that ecological understanding becomes richer when students are allowed to name harm in the language varieties through which they already think and feel.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of pairing close text analysis with reception data. The text analysis alone would have highlighted the campaign's anti-anthropocentric and metaphorical power. The reception data alone would have shown that students found it compelling and disturbing. Together, they reveal a more nuanced picture: the video is persuasive, but its persuasion is not innocent. It relies on emotional immersion and ecological shock, which can produce awareness, but also the sense that the only available future is collapse. That tension should not be ignored in environmental communication research, and it echoes recent work on youths' multimodal sensemaking (Smith et al., 2025). At a deeper level, the discussion suggests that ecological campaigns work best when they move from spectacle to scaffolding. Spectacle captures attention. Scaffolding turns attention into understanding and responsibility. *Birthplace* succeeds at the first but needs classroom mediation to achieve the second. This is why the pedagogical use of eco-media cannot be limited to showing the video and asking for impressions. Students need a guided discussion that connects the visual metaphor to real marine practices, policy choices, and local community action. Without that bridge, the campaign may do more harm than good to the agency.

The study also contributes to positive discourse analysis by showing that constructive ecological meaning does not require cheerful imagery. A text may be dark, unsettling, and ethically demanding while still creating a space for environmental critique. However, the critique must be balanced by some orientation toward action. In this sense, the video contains the seeds of a positive discourse because it clearly exposes harm. Its weakness is that it stops short of showing what a responsible human presence might look like after the warning has been delivered.

Finally, the findings confirm that social semiotics and ecolinguistics are complementary rather than redundant. Social semiotics explains the architecture of meaning, while ecolinguistics explains the moral and ecological direction of that meaning. The combined framework is especially useful for multimedia environmental texts because it avoids two common reductionisms: treating images as mere decoration or treating ecological discourse as a purely verbal matter. *Birthplace* shows that the politics of the ocean can be carried by composition, pacing, and bodily posture as much as by words. This is

also consistent with ecolinguistic work that treats appraisal and evaluative stance as central to environmental meaning (Isti'anah & Suhandano, 2022).

A broader implication is that the campaign makes visible a common weakness in environmental messaging: it relies on symbolic collapse to communicate urgency, but that same collapse can also obscure feasible action. The image of the sea swallowing the human figure is powerful precisely because it dramatizes accountability. Yet the same image can make responsibility appear terminal instead of relational. In a classroom, this is where discussion should begin. Students can be asked to distinguish between ecological consequence and ecological surrender, then to ask which local practices could interrupt the very cycle the video depicts. That move keeps the campaign from ending in despair and instead turns it into a diagnostic tool for waste culture.

The student responses also suggest that ecological interpretation becomes more precise when learners are allowed to speak from lived experience. Their comments about territory, arrogance, and injustice show that they did not read the video as an isolated work of art. They read it through memory, place, and social awareness. That is an important educational finding because it means climate media can serve as a bridge between media literacy and civic literacy. The campaign becomes more teachable when it is not treated as a closed aesthetic object. It becomes a prompt for naming how consumer habits, marine waste, and visual rhetoric meet in everyday life.

Methodologically, the study reinforces the need for bilingual and multimodal sensitivity in reception work. A single English reflection prompt would not fully capture the range of meanings students produced, especially when they moved between explanatory, affective, and evaluative language. Future research can take this further by examining how local languages shape the vocabulary of ecological judgment. Such work would not only enrich reception analysis; it would also challenge the assumption that environmental criticism must be articulated in a single standard code before it counts as rigorous academic insight.

A further implication concerns the ethics of environmental aesthetics. The video is visually beautiful, and that beauty is one reason it attracts attention. Yet beauty can become ethically complicated when it is used to package ecological devastation. The realization is not that aesthetic pleasure should be rejected, but that it should be interrogated. In this case, beauty intensifies the message by making the loss of marine life feel like a sensuous absence. At the same time, it can soften the issue's violence by making the scene appear too composed. For educators, this means the campaign should be read critically as an aesthetic artifact, not merely admired as a moving clip.

The student data also suggest that critical reading can coexist with emotional vulnerability. Several reflections reveal discomfort, shame, or sadness, but these emotions did not prevent analysis. Instead, they seemed to deepen it. That matters because environmental education often assumes that strong feelings are obstacles to reasoning. The present findings indicate the opposite: when students are given space to name their responses, emotion can become a pathway to interpretation. In practice, teachers should not rush to neutralize emotion when discussing climate change in the media. They should help students translate emotion into reflection, and reflection into action.

Another deeper insight concerns the role of local relevance. The campaign is produced globally, yet Filipino students did not treat it as foreign trivia. They linked it to marine vulnerability, waste disposal, and the moral burden of consumption, thereby making the text locally meaningful. This suggests that environmental media can travel across contexts when the issue itself is materially familiar. However, translation across contexts is never automatic. A text like *Birthplace* becomes pedagogically useful only when learners are allowed to connect its imagery to their own shorelines, urban waste streams, and community routines. Global media gains educational value when it is localized through interpretation.

The study also points to a practical reflection for curriculum design. If sustainability education is to move beyond awareness campaigns, it needs reading tasks that ask students to identify how a text works before they are asked to agree with it. Such sequencing prevents the classroom from collapsing into simple message consumption. Students first analyze gaze, composition, and metaphor. Then they evaluate the ethical and civic implications. Finally, they propose a response. This sequence is especially helpful for media that can foster eco-fatalism, as it allows critique without weakening the seriousness of the environmental problem.

In this sense, the article contributes to the broader debate on climate communication and behavioral change. Fear can draw attention, but fear alone does not create civic capacity. *Birthplace* confirms that a campaign may be effective at producing ecological unease while still leaving unanswered questions about agency. The deeper consciousness is that ecological communication must be measured not only by how strongly it warns, but also by whether it enables the audience to imagine a responsible continuation. The most useful environmental texts are not the ones that comfort; they are the ones that make responsibility thinkable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to explain how Birthplace constructs meaning in marine pollution and how Filipino multilingual undergraduates receive that meaning. The central question was not whether the campaign is visually impressive, but whether it teaches ecological responsibility in a way that is analytically coherent and pedagogically usable. The answer is mixed but valuable. The campaign clearly exposes the arrogance of human domination, the material violence of plastic pollution, and the vulnerability of marine life. At the same time, its ending can be read as ethically troubling because it seems to imagine restoration only through human disappearance. On that basis, the study recommends three problem-based responses.

First, educators should use the video as a guided critical reading task, not as a stand-alone inspirational clip. The discussion should connect the text to waste segregation, coastal care, consumption habits, and local marine protection, all of which align with SDG 14 and SDG 12. Second, curriculum designers should integrate eco-media analysis into communication and language classes so that students learn how ecological messages are constructed, not just what they say. Third, campaign designers should consider how to preserve urgency without drifting into eco-fatalism, especially when the intended audience includes young people who still need to see agency as possible.

To make these findings useful, teachers should use videos like Birthplace as guided reading tasks rather than just as inspirational clips. Specifically, classroom practice must encourage students to name the environmental problem, trace the semiotic choices that construct it, and propose local actions. This sequence is important because it converts simple critique into actual responsibility. Furthermore, teachers should welcome translanguaging; as the study shows, students express their deepest ecological insights effectively across their local linguistic repertoires. This approach supports SDG 4 by linking literacy to sustainability and respecting the diverse languages of multilingual learners, rather than forcing them into a single academic code.

Critical ecological reading can act as a powerful bridge between language study and public responsibility. In many university settings, communication tasks are still treated merely as exercises in comprehension or summary. However, this study shows that a richer task is possible: when students examine how a campaign organizes attention and makes waste visible, they learn to interrogate the rhetoric of environmental feeling itself. This skill heavily matters in the Philippine context, where coastal vulnerability and plastic use are everyday social realities, not abstract ideas. Furthermore, a good environmental text should invite critique and provoke responsible disagreement. For instance, the students' reluctance to accept the video's fatalistic ending was highly productive because it opened a valuable space for ethical reasoning. Therefore, when teachers use texts with strong visual grammar, they should not just ask if students understood the message. They should ask how the message was built, what emotions it activated, and what kind of environmental mindset it invited, making the lesson both analytically richer and civically useful.

Because this analysis focused on a single campaign text and one classroom cohort, the findings are context-sensitive rather than universal. However, this narrow focus is a strength. It provides depth, showing how ecological meaning is made, resisted, and taught without oversimplifying the complexity of the video or the learners. To build on this, future studies should compare Western-produced environmental videos with locally produced eco-campaigns from the Global South, especially those addressing marine waste, climate adaptation, and urban behavior. Researchers can also conduct long-term reception studies to see if immediate emotional reactions grow into sustained ecological commitment. Finally, comparative translanguaging studies would be highly useful in classrooms where students naturally alternate between English, Filipino, and regional languages. Ultimately, ecological meaning becomes educationally powerful only when textual analysis and actual student reception are read together.

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing does not apply to this article, as no new data were generated or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources, as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.