

Representations of human-nature relations in Gorontalo oral poetry: An ecocritical perspective

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Ecocriticism Gorontalo Human-Nature Interconnectedness Oral Poetry	Gorontalo oral poetry preserves ecological experience through culturally situated, communal, and intergenerational forms of expression. However, previous studies have primarily examined its linguistic structures, social functions, and cultural preservation, leaving its ecological philosophy and oral modes of transmission underexplored. This study explores four Gorontalo oral poems— <i>Lo Huidu</i> , <i>Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli</i> , <i>Bulalo Lo Limutu</i> , and <i>Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota</i> —using a qualitative descriptive approach and an ecocritical framework. Data obtained through audio recording, interviews, observation, transcription, and translation were analyzed thematically and interpretatively. The findings reveal a distinctive practical-relational ecological worldview organized around three interconnected principles. First, ecological continuity depends on everyday practices of restraint, care, cooperation, and collective restoration. Second, human-nature relationships are neither static nor inherently harmonious: nature sustains material and cultural life, but human conduct can also produce degradation, livelihood vulnerability, and environmental loss. Third, environmental experience becomes collective ecological memory through oral-literary features such as repetition, alternating voices, imperative expressions, narrative escalation, and communal address. These features transform planting, environmental degradation, and weather-related danger into memorable guidance that can be performed and transmitted across generations. The study advances ecocritical scholarship by identifying a culturally specific Gorontalo ecological worldview grounded in reciprocity, responsibility, vulnerability, and responsiveness to environmental change. It also contributes to oral-literature studies by demonstrating that oral poetry is not simply a repository of ecological messages but an active cultural process through which communities remember environmental change, evaluate human conduct, and transmit principles for sustaining ecological and cultural life.

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Introduction

Gorontalo oral poetry preserves culturally embedded understandings of relationships between communities and their natural environment. Mountains, vegetation, lakes, rainfall, lightning, and natural-resource use appear as elements of everyday ecological experience rather than decorative poetic imagery. This relationship is particularly significant in the context of Lake Limboto, whose sedimentation and declining environmental quality threaten its ecological and cultural functions (Baga et al., 2024). Four oral poems—*Lo Huidu*, *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli*, *Bulalo Lo Limutu*, and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota*—record different

encounters with the environment. *Lo Huidu* connects vegetation with dwelling, collective care, and protection from landslides; *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms plants and cultivation into a language of social relationships; *Bulalo Lo Limutu* contrasts the lake's life-supporting value with waste, sedimentation, and environmental loss; and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* converts rain, thunder, and lightning into warnings preserved through collective experience. These poems therefore provide a locally grounded basis for examining how Gorontalo communities inhabit, interpret, value, and respond to their environment.

The ecological meanings of these poems are inseparable from their status as oral literature. Gorontalo oral poetry includes such forms as *tuja'i*, *tanggomo*, *lohidu*, *taleningo*, *bungga*, and *bonito*, which perform different ceremonial, narrative, advisory, social, and cultural functions (Djou, 2019; Hinta et al., 2022; Tuloli, 2023). These forms are maintained by tradition bearers and circulate through oral performance, customary activities, community interaction, and intergenerational transmission. *Tuja'i*, for example, is performed in customary contexts such as engagement ceremonies, where poetic speech communicates social and cultural values to participants and audiences (Lamusu, 2020). *Lohidu* similarly combines poetic performance with the maintenance of the Gorontalo language and cultural identity (Hinta, 2021; Hinta et al., 2022). while *tanggomo* transforms socially significant events into orally transmitted narratives that carry communal lessons (Tuloli, 2023). In these settings, meaning is produced not only by the words of a poem but also through interactions among performers, audiences, performance occasions, and shared cultural memory. The concise, symbolic, rhythmic, and repeatable qualities of oral poetry allow individual and communal experiences to be remembered, performed, and transmitted across generations (Djou et al., 2023; Djou & Ntelu, 2022; Ntelu & Djou, 2017).

Contemporary ecological problems are connected not only to technical or scientific conditions but also to social values, ethical principles, and cultural systems (Hassanin et al., 2025). Environmental degradation is intensified when nature is perceived as an object of exploitation detached from human existence (Soulioti, 2022). Oral literature provides a cultural medium through which communities preserve environmental experience, collective memory, values, and worldviews (Abubakari, 2025; Finnegan, 2012). Ecocriticism offers an appropriate framework for examining these processes because it considers how literary texts position nature within cultural constructions and reveal the ethical consequences of human-environment relationships (Garrard, 2011). Bate's (2015) concept of dwelling explains how attachment to place develops through material, imaginative, and emotional engagement with the environment, while Clark (2011) situates humans within interconnected ecological networks rather than above or outside nature. These perspectives enable Gorontalo oral poetry to be examined as both literary representation and culturally transmitted environmental experience.

To maintain conceptual precision, this study distinguishes four related terms. Ecological knowledge refers to community understandings of environmental processes, natural signs, and ecological relationships developed through sustained interaction with particular environments (Miard, 2017). Environmental ethics refers to culturally embedded principles that guide responsible conduct toward nature, including restraint, care, restoration, and collective stewardship (Loder, 2025). Ecological consciousness denotes an awareness that humans are situated within, dependent upon, and capable of affecting broader ecological systems (Davis, 2024). Local wisdom encompasses the knowledge, values, symbols, and practices through which ecological understanding is culturally preserved and applied across generations (Aldyan et al., 2024). Thus, ecological knowledge concerns what communities understand about the environment; environmental ethics concerns how they should act toward it; ecological consciousness concerns how they position themselves within ecological systems; and local wisdom concerns the cultural processes through which these understandings and principles are maintained.

Studies of oral traditions in Dieng, India, and West Africa demonstrate that folklore and oral narratives transmit knowledge of human-nature relationships, sustainable resource management, and culturally embedded conservation practices (Abubakari, 2026; Assumi, 2026; Setiyoningsih et al., 2026). Research conducted in Indonesia and Vietnam similarly shows that oral narratives encourage ecological balance, respect for nature, and awareness of the consequences of exploitative human behavior (Hilmi et al., 2024; Le Duc, 2025; Sultoni et al., 2023; Suwandi et al., 2025). These studies establish oral literature as cultural heritage and a repository of ecological knowledge. However, they offer limited insight into how oral-poetic form, communal address, performance, and repetition transform environmental experience into collective ecological memory. They also provide insufficient explanation of how Gorontalo oral poetry combines everyday environmental practices, social symbolism, ecological degradation, collective responsibility, and experience-based warnings into a distinctive ecological worldview.

Existing studies of Gorontalo oral literature have predominantly concentrated on structural, linguistic, sociocultural, and cultural-preservation dimensions. Lamusu (2020) examined the local wisdom embedded in *tuja'i* performed during traditional engagement ceremonies, while Hinta (2021) investigated the structural characteristics of *lohidu*. Hinta et al. (2022) highlighted the role of oral poetry in maintaining

regional language and cultural identity, and Bouti et al. (2025) demonstrated the importance of oral traditions in preserving distinctive features of the Gorontalo language amid technological change. Studies of Gorontalo folktales have likewise focused on narrative structures and cultural meanings. Lantowa & Dunggio (2021) analyzed the morphology of the *Perang Panipi* folktale using Propp's narratological framework, whereas Bagtayan (2021) examined the mythic structures, binary oppositions, and cultural constructions of *Janjia Lo U Duluwo* through Lévi-Straussian structuralism. Although these studies affirm the linguistic and cultural significance of Gorontalo oral literature, they have paid limited attention to its representations of human-nature relationships, environmental tensions, ecological knowledge, collective responsibility, and the oral processes through which ecological memory is performed and transmitted.

Addressing these gaps, the present study explores four selected Gorontalo oral poems through an ecocritical lens while attending to their oral-literary characteristics. It identifies the dominant ecological orientation articulated by each poem and comparatively considers how the four texts collectively construct a broader ecological worldview. The study argues that Gorontalo oral poetry expresses a distinctive practical-relational ecological worldview in which nature functions as a dwelling to be maintained, a source of social and cultural meaning, a vulnerable shared inheritance requiring collective restoration, and an active source of experiential guidance. This worldview does not assume that human-nature relationships are inherently harmonious; ecological continuity instead depends on restraint, cooperation, responsibility, and responsiveness to environmental conditions. Through symbolic language, narrative progression, communal address, performance, and repetition, the poems transform ecological experience into collective memory, ethical guidance, and intergenerational knowledge. This study therefore extends ecocritical scholarship on Indonesian oral literature by demonstrating that the ecological significance of Gorontalo oral poetry lies not only in the environmental values it contains but also in the oral and cultural processes through which those values are remembered, performed, and transmitted.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with ecocriticism serving as the theoretical framework for examining representations of human-nature relationships in Gorontalo oral poetry. Garrard's (2011) perspective was used to identify how nature, human actions, and ecological consequences are represented in the texts. Bate's (2015) concept of *dwelling* was employed to examine community attachment to place through resource use, environmental care, and restraint, while Clark's (2011) concept of ecological interconnectedness was used to analyze causal relationships and interdependence among humans, nonhuman elements, and environmental conditions.

The primary data comprised four oral poems: *Lo Huidu* (Poem of the Mountain), *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* (Antiphonal Poem), *Bulalo Lo Limutu* (Lake Limboto), and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* (The Man Struck by Lightning). These poems were purposively selected because they represent different ecological experiences. They were obtained through direct recordings of performances or recitations by three maestros or tradition bearers in Duano Village, Central Suwawa District, Bone Bolango Regency. The recordings were made during oral-literature performances regularly organized by a local arts and cultural association in collaboration with Gorontalo oral-literature maestros. Data were collected through audio recording, interviews, observation, and documentation. These complementary techniques made it possible to obtain the oral texts while also documenting the cultural contexts of their performances (Finnegan, 2012). Interviews with the performers and observations of their social and environmental surroundings provided information about cultural meanings, performers' experiences, speakers, audiences, and performance contexts (Spradley, 2016). Cultural documentation, oral-literature archives, and previous studies were used as supporting data to strengthen the contextual interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The research team transcribed the recorded performances into written Gorontalo and subsequently translated the texts into English. The Gorontalo texts remained the primary basis of analysis, while the English translations were used to present textual excerpts. Translation accuracy was checked by repeatedly comparing the recordings, transcriptions, and translations. The recordings, transcriptions, culturally specific terms and meanings were also confirmed with tradition bearers or competent Gorontalo speakers. The data were analyzed thematically and interpretatively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Words, phrases, lines, and stanzas depicting natural elements, human activities, environmental conditions, cultural symbols, and ecological consequences were treated as units of analysis. These units were assigned descriptive codes, including sustenance, attachment to place, restraint in resource use, environmental degradation, collective responsibility, and natural signs. Related codes were then compared within and across the four poems and grouped into broader themes. The analytical categories were therefore not predetermined but generated through repeated reading, coding, comparison, and thematic grouping.

The theoretical framework was operationalized through specific textual indicators. *Dwelling* was identified through representations of inhabiting a place, using its resources, developing attachment to the environment, exercising restraint, and engaging in environmental care. Environmental ethics was identified through expressions of prohibition, obligation, protection, restoration, and collective responsibility. Ecological interconnectedness was recognized through relationships among human behavior, environmental change, safety, and the continuity of life. Experience-based ecological knowledge was identified through natural signs, risks, consequences, advice, and the transformation of individual experience into collective memory. The analysis also considered oral-literary elements, including speakers, audiences, repetition, narrative sequence, forms of address, communal voice, and performance context.

This process generated four thematic orientations: *Lo Huidu* foregrounds nature as dwelling and ecological care; *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* presents nature as a language of social relationships; *Bulalo Lo Limutu* exposes ecological degradation and collective responsibility; and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* represents nature as warning and experiential knowledge. These orientations were not treated as entirely separate categories. The four poems were subsequently compared. The four poems to formulate the practical-relational ecological worldview collectively constructed in Gorontalo oral poetry.

Interpretive credibility was maintained through triangulation of recordings, interviews, observations, cultural documentation, and previous studies; repeated textual examination; and collaborative review among the researchers. Culturally specific meanings were confirmed with tradition bearers, while the correspondence among codes, themes, and textual evidence was examined collaboratively. Presenting original excerpts alongside their English translations also enabled readers to assess the relationship between the textual evidence and its interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis identified four distinct but interconnected ecological orientations. *Lo Huidu* represents nature as a dwelling sustained through restraint and collective care; *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms cultivation into a language of social relationships; *Bulalo Lo Limutu* exposes the tension between ecological dependence and environmental degradation; and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* transforms natural warnings and human vulnerability into collective memory. The following sections closely examine the textual and oral-literary features of each poem before comparing the ecological worldview they collectively construct.

Lo Huidu: Nature as Dwelling and Ecological Care

Lo Huidu constructs dwelling as an active relationship between communal life and environmental care. In Bate's (2015) sense, dwelling involves more than occupying a physical location; it entails attachment to place and responsibility for maintaining its life-supporting conditions. This orientation first appears in an imperative addressed to the community.

Openu bungo lo turi
Pomulowa to bihu dalalo

Though it is only a turi tree
Plant it by the roadside

The concessive phrase *openu* ("though it is only") elevates an ordinary turi tree into an ecologically significant presence. Its value lies not primarily in commercial exchange but in its capacity to improve a shared roadside environment. The imperative *pomulowa* ("plant it") also shifts ecological care from an abstract value to a practical action that listeners can perform. In oral delivery, the concise pairing of an ordinary plant with a direct command makes the message memorable and readily transmissible. The poem develops this ethic through another familiar plant.

Bongo o hungolio
Dila bolo piya'ata
Dalalo o wolungio
Sanangi ta hihuwata

The coconut tree bears fruit
Do not climb it just yet
The road is shaded by trees
Delighting those who walk along it

The coconut tree performs two related functions: its fruit provides sustenance, while its foliage creates shade for travelers. The prohibition *Dila bolo piya'ata* ("Do not climb it just yet") introduces a tension between immediate consumption and ecological continuity. Although the fruit is available, human access to it must be delayed. The stanza therefore does not portray harmony as an automatic condition; it suggests that the relationship can become extractive when immediate human interests override restraint. Dwelling remains sustainable only when community members recognize that natural resources have temporal limits and ecological functions beyond direct consumption. Environmental care is subsequently expressed through a communal voice.

Mohuyula ito mo mongu
Momongu upona'owalo
Malo gaga lo kambungu
Wanu hitumula pilomulo

Together we build
 Building the roads
 How beautiful the village becomes
 When it is filled with plants

The pronoun *ito* ("we") and the expression *mohuyula* ("working together") transform tree planting from an individual activity into a communal practice. The parallel association of road building, village improvement, and vegetation indicates that development is not imagined as the removal of nature. Rather, a desirable village emerges when constructed infrastructure and plant life coexist. Because these lines are recited orally, the inclusive voice does more than describe cooperation: it invites performers and listeners to recognize themselves as participants in maintaining the shared environment. The protective consequences of this collective care are stated concisely in another stanza.

Wanu hu'idu polodu
Molamingo toyontulo

When the mountains are densely forested
 They are far from landslides

The conditional structure connects dense forest cover with protection from landslides. Instead of explaining soil stability through scientific terminology, the stanza condenses an observed ecological relationship into a brief causal formulation. Its concise and repeatable form enables knowledge derived from living in a mountainous environment to circulate as communal ecological memory. Vegetation is therefore simultaneously part of the landscape and a condition of human safety.

This representation resembles Dieng oral traditions, in which water sustains both material and spiritual life (Setiyoningsih et al., 2026), and Roten folktales, in which cultural practices regulate the use of marine resources (Wahyuni et al., 2025). However, *Lo Huidu* locates environmental responsibility in particularly ordinary and repeatable practices: planting a roadside tree, delaying harvesting, greening the village, and preserving mountain vegetation. It therefore constructs dwelling as a practical and communal environmental ethic rather than simply affirming human dependence on nature.

Read in relation to the other Gorontalo poems, *Lo Huidu* presents the ecological conditions that make communal life habitable, but it also reveals their fragility. The commands to plant and refrain from premature harvesting imply that ecological continuity depends on human choices. This orientation provides an important contrast with *Bulalo Lo Limutu*, where the failure of collective care results in pollution, sedimentation, and environmental loss.

Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli: Nature as a Language of Social Relations

Whereas *Lo Huidu* emphasizes the material practices through which people maintain a habitable environment, *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* shows how agrarian experience shapes the symbolic and performative language of social relationships. Papaya, turmeric, and planting become cultural signs through which interpersonal intentions are proposed, answered, and negotiated.

Tingga poleleya mai
Me'ipomulo lo popaya

Just tell me directly
 If you wish me to plant papaya for you

Ma polele'u mai

Me'ipomulo alawahu

Then I shall tell you
To plant turmeric for me

The stanza is structured as a verbal exchange. One voice introduces the image of planting papaya, and another responds with planting turmeric. This alternating structure reflects the antiphonal character of the poem: meaning is produced not by a single speaker but through reciprocal utterances. The repetition of *me'ipomulo* ("planting") links the two voices and gives the exchange rhythmic and semantic coherence. In performance, this repetition allows speakers and listeners to recognize the relationship between the proposal and its response.

Papaya and turmeric function as shared cultural codes representing relationships between men and women. Their meanings derive from the community's familiarity with cultivation rather than from their botanical characteristics alone. Planting suggests beginning something whose development requires time, care, and continuity. The metaphor therefore connects the cultivation of plants with the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal bonds.

However, the exchange does not portray social relationships as automatically harmonious. The expressions "just tell me directly" and "then I shall tell you" emphasize communication, reciprocity, and response. One speaker's intention must be acknowledged and answered by the other. Like cultivation, a relationship cannot develop through unilateral action; it depends on mutual participation and sustained care. The natural metaphor consequently expresses both the possibility of social connection and the conditions necessary for maintaining it.

Bate's (2015) concept of *dwelling* helps illuminate this symbolic relationship because attachment to an environment is expressed not only through material practices but also through the language and imagination developed within a particular place. In *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli*, cultivation provides a culturally familiar vocabulary for understanding social commitment. Nature is not simply compared with human relationships; ecological experience supplies the conceptual pattern through which those relationships are articulated.

Fabry (2024) similarly demonstrates that poetry can preserve collective understandings of relationships between communities and their environments. Nevertheless, *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* adds a distinctly dialogic dimension: ecological imagery is activated through alternating voices rather than presented as a fixed statement. Its oral and antiphonal structure enables cultural knowledge to be performed, repeated, and renewed through interaction between speakers and audiences.

Read alongside *Lo Huidu*, the poem expands the meaning of dwelling from material care to social meaning. *Lo Huidu* represents planting as a collective practice that improves and protects the environment, whereas *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms planting into a metaphor for initiating and nurturing interpersonal relationships. Together, the poems show that nature sustains Gorontalo communal life in two interconnected ways: materially, by supporting a habitable environment, and culturally, by providing a shared language through which social continuity is negotiated.

Bulalo Lo Limutu: Ecological Degradation and Collective Responsibility

While *Lo Huidu* depicts the practices that sustain a habitable environment, *Bulalo Lo Limutu* exposes the fragility of such conditions when collective care fails. The poem begins with an image of Lake Limboto as a fish habitat and source of livelihood.

Malo sambe gaga lo tola
Bo dila potalilio

How fine the snakehead fish is
Yet it is not for sale

The appreciative expression "how fine" emphasizes the value of the snakehead fish, while "yet it is not for sale" interrupts an exclusively commercial reading of that value. Within the poem's ecological sequence, the fish signifies both the lake's biodiversity and its capacity to support community life. Its value cannot be reduced entirely to exchange because it is embedded in a broader relationship among habitat, livelihood, and cultural attachment to Lake Limboto. This image of ecological value is sharply contrasted with the lake's subsequent condition.

Puputo ma hi toto
Bulalo ilotambulilio

Garbage has piled up

The lake has become silted up

The parallel lines move from visible waste to its cumulative ecological consequence. The phrase “has piled up” emphasizes accumulation rather than an isolated act of pollution, while “has become silted up” indicates an environmental change that develops over time. The concise sequence establishes a causal relationship between repeated human practices and the declining condition of the lake. Garbage is therefore both a material pollutant and textual evidence of failed environmental responsibility.

The contrast between the valuable fish and the degraded lake exposes a fundamental ecological contradiction. The community depends on Lake Limboto for biodiversity, livelihood, and cultural continuity, yet human activities contribute to the deterioration of the same ecological system. This tension challenges any assumption that human-nature relationships in Gorontalo oral poetry are inherently harmonious. In Garrard’s (2011) ecocritical terms, the lake’s degradation cannot be separated from the cultural choices and patterns of conduct through which the environment is used and neglected.

Ecological loss in the poem extends beyond physical pollution and sedimentation. Because the lake supports material and cultural life, its deterioration also creates human vulnerability: declining ecological capacity threatens livelihood security and weakens community attachment to place. *Bulalo Lo Limutu* therefore remembers environmental change as both an ecological crisis and a crisis in the community’s ethical relationship with its environment. After exposing this failure, the poem shifts from description to direct communal instruction.

Bulalolio ma dahalo
Wawu po’oberesiolo

Protect the lake
And keep it clean

The two imperatives—“protect” and “keep clean”—transform ecological diagnosis into a call for restorative action. Their concise and repeatable form is significant within oral performance: the commands can be remembered, recited, and directed toward successive audiences. The poem does not identify environmental protection as the responsibility of a single individual or institution. Instead, its unqualified imperative voice addresses the community collectively, turning the degraded lake into a shared ethical concern.

Nevertheless, the command also reveals a tension between ecological knowledge and ecological practice. The community may understand that the lake requires protection while continuing to participate in behavior that contributes to its deterioration. Awareness alone is therefore insufficient; environmental ethics becomes meaningful only when it produces sustained collective action. The poem’s movement from value, to degradation, to command dramatizes this unresolved gap between knowing and acting.

Digo oral poetry similarly criticizes environmentally destructive conduct and promotes more responsible human-nature relationships (Kosgei, 2021), while Yaacob (2024) shows how environmental poetry can communicate conservation responsibilities. *Bulalo Lo Limutu*, however, organizes these functions into a particularly place-specific sequence: it recalls the life-supporting value of Lake Limboto, records its deterioration, and directs the affected community toward restoration. The poem consequently does not merely confirm that oral traditions contain ecological values; it uses contrast and imperative address to transform local environmental loss into a collective moral claim.

Compared with *Lo Huidu*, *Bulalo Lo Limutu* represents a disrupted form of dwelling. *Lo Huidu* depicts ecological continuity as the result of planting, restraint, cooperation, and forest preservation, whereas *Bulalo Lo Limutu* shows what occurs when such care is not maintained. Read together, the poems reveal that dwelling is neither stable nor naturally harmonious. Communities can preserve the environmental foundations of shared life, but they can also become agents of ecological damage. This tension between dependence and destruction gives the Gorontalo ecological worldview a critical dimension grounded in vulnerability, responsibility, and the possibility of restoration.

Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota: Nature as Warning, Vulnerability, and Collective Memory

Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota represents ecological knowledge as the ability to recognize environmental signs and modify human behavior accordingly. As a *tanggomo*, the poem organizes this knowledge through a narrative sequence in which worsening weather, repeated warnings, human persistence, and eventual disaster create a culturally memorable account of risk and vulnerability. The narrative begins with the first signs of danger.

To uddi dehu dehu

Ilato baya-bayahu
Tio dila lohalahu
Sambe tio lo batahu

When the rain began to fall
 Lightning flashed across the sky
 He paid no heed to the warnings
 Until he was drenched by the rain

Rain and lightning indicate a change in environmental conditions, but the protagonist does not alter his activity. The line “he paid no heed” establishes the central tension between perceiving a natural phenomenon and responding appropriately to it. Ecological knowledge is therefore presented not simply as familiarity with weather patterns but as a practical capacity to allow environmental information to influence human decisions. The danger becomes more urgent in the following stanza.

Ilato wawu bulonggodu
Dila hemo titonggodu
Tamani ibo-ibodu
Ulu’io bo to awadu

Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled
 Without ever ceasing
 His companion kept calling him
 Yet his hand remained on the fishing line

The repeated lightning, continuous thunder, and companion’s calls form multiple layers of warning. Nature’s signs are reinforced through human communication, yet the protagonist remains attached to the fishing line. The line “his hand remained on the fishing line” condenses the conflict between immediate human purpose and environmental responsiveness into a single physical image.

The fishing line may represent more than stubbornness. It is also connected to fishing as a practical livelihood activity. The protagonist’s refusal to release it therefore reveals a tension between pursuing an immediate material objective and recognizing environmental danger. The poem does not portray the human-nature relationship as entirely harmonious: human dependence on nature can produce vulnerability when the pursuit of resources prevents an appropriate response to ecological conditions. The fishing line consequently symbolizes fixation on an objective that has ceased to be safe, even though warnings are already visible, audible, and socially communicated. The narrative reaches its climax in the next stanza.

Ilato bo imilata
Bulonggodu pilolota
Tio ati bata bata
Lo tuhata botu bulota

Lightning flashed brightly
 Thunder roared aloud
 He was soaked through
 Struck by a bolt of lightning

The stanza intensifies the sensory dimensions of the event through brightness, sound, bodily exposure, and physical injury. This progression is important to the poem’s oral and aesthetic force: listeners encounter the danger as an escalating sequence rather than as an abstract statement about environmental safety. The lightning strike is the culmination of repeatedly ignored warnings, demonstrating that human intentions cannot suspend the consequences of environmental processes.

The incident also foregrounds human vulnerability. Although the protagonist attempts to continue controlling his activity, he cannot control the weather conditions within which that activity occurs. The poem therefore situates humans inside ecological processes rather than above them. Fear and bodily risk become part of its ecological lesson, showing that environmental awareness is necessary not only for conservation but also for survival and adaptation. The closing stanza changes both the voice and the function of the narrative.

Utiye lali po’ela
Ode olanto nga’amila
Openu hemongailo

Batanga po'otalalo

Let this be a reminder
For all of us
Even while fishing
Take care of yourself

The phrase *ode olanto nga'amila* ("for all of us") is central to the poem's oral-literary significance. It shifts the narrative from an account of one person's misfortune to a communal address. The protagonist's experience no longer belongs only to the individual; through performance and repetition, it becomes knowledge available to the wider community. The closing imperative invites performers and audiences to remember the incident and apply its lesson to future situations.

This transformation distinguishes the poem from a simple piece of environmental advice. The *tanggomo* preserves the sequence of warning, neglect, consequence, and reflection as collective ecological memory. Its narrative structure allows an experience of danger to be repeatedly performed, interpreted, and transmitted across generations. Ecological knowledge is therefore not stored only as factual information about rain, thunder, and lightning but embodied in a memorable story about human error and vulnerability.

Other indigenous narratives also connect environmental knowledge with culturally transmitted ethical guidance (Jose & Rahul, 2026). Karo myths relate ecological practices to forest conservation and agricultural continuity (Nasution et al., 2025), while Malaysian folktales communicate environmental values through narrative forms that encourage sustainable conduct (Ab Jabar et al., 2024). *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota*, however, foregrounds a different mechanism: it converts an individual failure to interpret natural signs into a collectively remembered narrative of risk. Its contribution lies in showing that ecological knowledge becomes socially effective when experience is narratively organized, communally addressed, and repeatedly transmitted.

Compared with the other poems, *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* gives environmental responsiveness a more urgent role. *Lo Huidu* teaches communities to maintain the ecological conditions of dwelling; *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms cultivation into a language of reciprocal social relationships; and *Bulalo Lo Limutu* records environmental degradation caused by failed collective care. *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* adds that humans must also recognize their vulnerability and respond to ecological signs. Read together, the poems suggest that sustainable communal life requires not only care and responsibility but also attentiveness, adaptation, and the transmission of experience through collective memory.

Comparative Synthesis: The Practical-Relational Ecological Worldview of Gorontalo Oral Poetry

Read together, the four poems construct a practical-relational ecological worldview that connects environmental dependence, cultural meaning, ecological vulnerability, collective responsibility, and experience-based adaptation. Nature does not perform a single function: it sustains material life, supplies a language for social relationships, suffers the consequences of human conduct, and provides signs through which communities learn to respond to environmental risk.

Each poem contributes a different dimension to this worldview. *Lo Huidu* presents dwelling as a practice of planting, restraint, cooperation, and forest preservation. *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms cultivation into a dialogic language for initiating and sustaining interpersonal relationships. *Bulalo Lo Limutu* disrupts the assumption of ecological harmony by exposing the contradiction between community dependence on Lake Limboto and human activities that contribute to its degradation. *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* adds human vulnerability and adaptive learning by transforming an individual failure to recognize natural warnings into collective memory.

The poems consequently position humans in multiple and sometimes contradictory roles. They are beneficiaries of ecological resources and creators of cultural meaning, but they may also become agents of degradation. They must therefore act as responsible stewards and attentive learners. Ecological interconnectedness in these poems is not an idealized condition of permanent harmony; it is a fragile relationship that must be continually maintained through restraint, reciprocity, collective action, and responsiveness to environmental change.

This worldview shares a non-anthropocentric orientation with Indonesian oral traditions that emphasize reciprocal human-environment relationships (Hilmi et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2023). However, other traditions foreground different aspects of ecological relationality: Hawaiian literature emphasizes nature's agency (Indriyanto, 2024), Vedic literature highlights ecological harmony (Desai et al., 2024), Seliš traditions stress the inseparability of human and nonhuman life (Pete, 2020), and Mapuche ecopoetry

foregrounds nature's intrinsic and spiritual value (Fierro-Concha et al., 2026). Gorontalo oral poetry is distinctive because it combines ordinary environmental practices, plant-based social symbolism, critical memories of ecological loss, and narratives of risk within one practical cultural framework.

The oral-literary form is central to this ecological philosophy. Imperatives, repetition, alternating voices, narrative escalation, and communal address make ecological experience memorable and socially transmissible. Through performance, individual observations and experiences are reorganized as shared ethical guidance and collective memory. Gorontalo oral poetry therefore does more than preserve environmental messages: it functions as a cultural process through which communities remember ecological change, evaluate human conduct, and transmit principles for sustaining both ecological and cultural life.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Lo Huidu*, *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli*, *Bulalo Lo Limutu*, and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* reveals a distinctive practical-relational ecological worldview in Gorontalo oral poetry. *Lo Huidu* constructs dwelling through planting, restraint, cooperation, and environmental care; *Pa'ia Hungo Lo Poli* transforms cultivation into a dialogic language for social relationships; *Bulalo Lo Limutu* exposes the contradiction between dependence on Lake Limboto and human practices that contribute to its degradation; and *Ta Ilotuhata Lo Botu Bulota* transforms environmental warning, human vulnerability, and individual experience into collective ecological memory. Read together, the poems demonstrate that human-nature relationships are neither static nor inherently harmonious: humans depend on ecological resources and derive cultural meanings from nature, but they can also damage the environmental systems that sustain their livelihoods and cultural continuity. Ecological interconnectedness therefore functions as an ethical and practical principle requiring restraint, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and responsiveness to environmental change. This practical-relational orientation distinguishes Gorontalo ecological thought by connecting everyday environmental practices, social symbolism, memories of ecological loss, and experience-based adaptation within a coherent cultural framework. The oral-literary form is integral to this ecological worldview, as imperatives, repetition, alternating voices, narrative escalation, and communal address enable environmental experiences to be remembered, evaluated, performed, and transmitted across generations. In particular, the transformation of individual experience into a lesson "for all of us" demonstrates that Gorontalo oral poetry functions not simply as a repository of ecological messages but as an active cultural process through which ecological knowledge and collective memory are continually renewed. The study thus contributes to ecocritical and oral-literature scholarship by showing that ecological meaning is produced through the interaction of textual imagery, oral performance, cultural context, and communal transmission. However, this study is limited to four poems performed or recited by three tradition bearers in a specific fieldwork context; therefore, its findings do not represent the full diversity of Gorontalo oral literature or its performance practices. Future research could examine additional genres, including *tuja'i*, *palebohu*, *taleningo*, *leningo*, *bungga*, and *bunito*, across different performers, audiences, locations, and performance settings. Combining ecocriticism with performance studies, ethnolinguistics, indigenous ecological knowledge, and postcolonial environmental humanities would further clarify how Gorontalo communities negotiate ecological change through oral tradition. Overall, Gorontalo oral poetry emerges as a living cultural mechanism that connects ecological care, social continuity, environmental critique, human vulnerability, and intergenerational learning.

Declarations

Author contribution : Zilfa Achmad Bagtayan served as the principal investigator and was responsible for the overall research project. He led the research design, development of the theoretical framework, coordination of data analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. Yunus Dama participated in field data collection, interviews, documentation, audio recording, transcription, and data validation. Agrariawan Tamsil contributed to the ecocritical analysis, literature review, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript revision. Jafar Lantowa contributed to the comparative analysis of the poems, refinement of the ecocritical argument, interpretation of the findings, and substantial critical revision of the manuscript in response to the reviewers' comments. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for their respective contributions.

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