

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Annotation: In the article important points about basic role of teaching environmental education in primary education are highlighted. On the other hand, effective usage of interactive methods in environmental education teaching and learning process.

Key words: *eco-consciousness, environmental education, holistic approach, practical experiences, daily learning, environmental awareness, Hands-on Learning, Nature-based Activities.*

It is known that environmental education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our planet. By introducing eco-consciousness to young minds during their formative years, we can instill a sense of responsibility and care for the environment. Elementary education provide an excellent platform to impart environmental knowledge and promote sustainable practices among children. Environmental education has made significant strides in recent years, with an increasing recognition of its importance in fostering environmental awareness and sustainable practices. However, despite these advancements, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in order to fully integrate comprehensive environmental education into primary school curricula.

One positive aspect of the current state of environmental education is the growing acknowledgment of its interdisciplinary nature. Many schools now understand that environmental education should not be limited to a single subject

but should be integrated across various disciplines, including science, social studies, and even arts and humanities [1]. This holistic approach allows students to develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and their interconnectedness with other aspects of society. Additionally, there has been a shift towards more hands-on and experiential learning methods in environmental education. Recognizing the importance of practical experiences, many schools now incorporate field trips, outdoor activities, and project-based learning into their environmental education programs. These approaches not only engage students actively but also provide them with real-world experiences that foster a sense of connection to the environment. It is obvious that it is necessary to strengthen environmental education in primary school as one of the most important components of natural science education. The results of a study conducted in Indonesia showed that most teachers agreed that it was important to integrate environmental education into the learning process of students, especially primary school students. However, this integration still has limitations, e.g., lack of time. On the other hand, despite the fact that the relevance of environmental education has been recognised, there are still very few changes in school practices. The implementation and effectiveness of environmental education depends mainly on the competence of teachers. Spanish researchers analysed the situation of environmental education, teacher competencies and teacher training. The analysis revealed the lack of environmental competencies of future primary school teachers, as well as obvious gaps in teacher training programmes in terms of environmental education. A similar situation has been recorded in previous studies, stating that the training of future teachers in the field of environmental education is insufficient. Various approaches are used for the improvement of environmental literacy. Saribas et al. analysed the impact of special environmental courses on improving the environmental literacy of university students[2]. The results showed that the participants' attitude towards the environment, awareness of the use of the environment and beliefs about their effectiveness increased significantly, although,

at the end of the course, their environmental knowledge and concern for the environment did not change significantly. Turkoglu study showed that pre-service teachers had more theoretical knowledge than in-service teachers and in-service teachers had more practical knowledge than pre-service teachers. Thus, an important question remains, how to integrate environmental education into the daily learning of students. Researchers claim that there is a need for more specific content of environmental education in teacher training study programmes.

The importance of natural science knowledge in environmental education is emphasized by Kuckienė and Makarskaitė-Petkevičienė, Yeşilyurt et al.[3]. Recent Turkish researchers presented an action study, confirming that environmental knowledge provision improves primary school students' environmental awareness. Fokides and Kefalinou (2020) revealed measures, i.e., the impact of spherical videos on primary school students' environmental education, teaching them about endangered species. Nowadays, utilizing different interactive methods and approaches are demanded in every sphere of education. So, now we will analyze approaches to Environmental Education in Elementary education Schools[4].

➤ Hands-on Learning through Nature-based Activities

Engaging students in outdoor activities like nature walks, gardening, and field trips to parks or nature reserves allows them to connect with nature firsthand. These experiences provide practical knowledge and instill a sense of stewardship for the environment.

➤ Incorporating Environmental Themes Across Subjects

Environmental education need not be confined to a specific subject; it can be integrated across the curriculum. For example, teachers can explore environmental themes in science classes, discuss environmental issues in social studies, or even encourage eco-themed creative writing exercises in language arts.

➤ Guest Speakers and Collaborations

Bringing in guest speakers, such as local environmentalists or experts, can expose students to real-world environmental challenges and success stories. Collaborations with environmental organizations can also enrich the learning experience and inspire students to take action.

Benefits of Nurturing Eco-Consciousness in Elementary School Students:

- a. **Fostering a Sense of Responsibility and Empowerment-** when children learn that their actions have an impact on the environment, they begin to understand their role in preserving it. Feeling empowered to make a positive difference cultivates a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the classroom.
- b. **Building Sustainable Habits for the Future-** by incorporating eco-conscious behaviors like waste reduction, energy conservation, and water-saving practices into daily routines, students develop sustainable habits that can last a lifetime.
- c. **Creating Future Environmental Leaders-** nurturing eco-consciousness from a young age can pave the way for the emergence of future environmental leaders. These students may pursue careers in environmental science, conservation, or advocacy, contributing significantly to the planet's well-being.

To sum up all given facts above it should be noted that in the general programme of natural sciences (grades 1-8) students are encouraged to recognize natural science problems and solve them, guided by the principles of sustainable development, healthy lifestyle, responsibly applying the acquired knowledge and skills in various life situations. The emphasis on natural science literacy is evident in the programme, as this would help the student in making personal decisions, the validity of solutions to local and global natural science problems; to understand the changes in nature caused by human activity and to take personal responsibility for preserving the environment, protecting one's own and other people's health.

However, when describing achievements, it is more viewed from the perspective of a person but not from the position of nature, emphasizing the benefits provided to a person by nature. For example, it explains the importance of preservation and care of natural resources for people's quality of life, the usefulness of recycling secondary raw materials. It gives examples of how it contributes and could contribute to the preservation of the environment, and conservation of resources. And this is confusing because knowledge does not mean understanding and living according to environmental principles. Thus, the pursuit of one of the most important educational priorities of the 21st century – educational renewal – encourages analysing and evaluating the possibilities of environmental education in primary school, on the other hand, the integration of environmental issues into the content of university study programmes. The aim of the study was to analyse the position of students, future teachers of preschool and primary education, in terms of the significance, problems and vision of practical implementation of environmental education.

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