



The role of education in environmental protection

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Highlights

- Survival of humans and improvement of their standard of living require an awareness of the role of environment, acknowledgement of its importance in our lives, and development of a positive attitude to preserve and improve its quality.
- In order to protect or reconstruct the environment, first of all, human groups need to be trained.
- Environmental education can strengthen a culture of responsibility towards protection of both immediate environment and the entire planet, which is necessary for sustainable development.
- The purpose of environmental education is to raise individuals who are aware of environmental issues and to create a sense of responsibility in them to protect and support the environment.
- Rather than an attempt to increase theoretical knowledge in its audience, environmental education needs to aim at empowering people to identify environmental issues, critically analyze them, explore the viable solutions, and actually contribute in solving them.
- Environmentally educated citizens are environmentalist partners that can inform their families about environmental issues and transfer their experiences to the family environment.
- With an environment protection orientation and internalized sensitivity to preserve the environment, the next fathers and mothers will then transmit the green mindset to the subsequent generation.

Keywords: Education, environment, green, preservation, protection, sustainable development

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Introduction

There is now a general awareness among the public of the importance of environmental issues and their consequences. Anthropogenic activities

are among the main factors in changing the conditions of the Earth's biosphere and destruction of the environment. Due to unscrupulous handling of the environment, human societies have been facing numerous challenges including consumerism, drought and water shortage, loss of natural pastures and green spaces, marginalization in cities, water, air, and

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noise pollution, and increase in civil and industrial wastes which are at times hazardous for the entire planet. With time, humans have come to realize that maintaining and improving the environment should be an integrated component of sustainable development. An understanding in the mankind of the need for managing the planet involves principled use of the environment, preserving the nonrenewable natural resources for future generations, and preventing destruction of habitats while meeting the needs of the current generation.

Education for environmental protection

Environmental problems created by humans cannot be completely solved by using technology. In order to address these problems, human behavior must change. Therefore, the key to solving environmental crises will be in education to improve human behavior in the surrounding environment. It is also necessary to search for ways to increase the role of people in protecting the environment, preventing its destruction, and optimal exploitation of existing natural resources, which are national capital to be preserved for future generations. Turning environment preservation challenges into an issue of public concern is conducive to raise their contribution and is a firm step in preservation of the environment. The role of students in preserving the environment cannot be overstated as the best time to form environmentally- concerned and responsible citizens is the childhood and during the school years. In fact, the middle years of education are critical in forming a positive attitude to the environment in children and teenagers.

Environmental education covers three levels of perception (knowledge and understanding), emotional valuation and internalization, and action (Piri and Ghasemi, 2010). Instead of simply imparting theoretical knowledge, environmental education needs to aim at empowering people to identify environmental challenges, critically analyze these issues, explore the viable solutions, and eventually contribute in solving them. It seeks to educate citizens aware of the bio-physical environment and related issues, the environmentalist partners who are eager to help with finding and implementing solutions. With

appropriate investment in the future generations of the society, they can be made aware of environmental protection early when their personality is being formed. By increasing awareness of the environmental health, education can guide people to reduce negative impacts on the environment through more efficient energy consumption and optimal use of water and other natural resources, especially in areas with shortages. Improving environmental education will lead to sustainable attention to environmental issues (Lin and Su, 2019). The pressure of the civil societies and the elite is influential in pushing the government towards agreements to control greenhouse gases and reduce the level of pollutant emissions. A citizen survey on global warming conducted in the United States revealed that the higher the level of education of the respondents, the higher their participation in environmentally friendly behaviors (Lubell, Zahran, Vedlitz, 2007).

Education is the introduction and initiation of intellectual maturity and deepening the power of thinking and mental analysis in people. In fact, effective education is a strategic tool for social transformation and development and the most important tool that society has to face future challenges since it has the potential to improve skills, expertise, insights, and attitudes in human resources and transform different strata of the society. National and global progress are increasingly based on products and services that are provided by educated and trained minds, not just in laboratories and research institutions, but in every layer of the field and society. The goal of education as the United Nations perceives it has been integration of the principles of sustainable development with human values in order to create a sustainable society (UNESCO, 2005). In this perspective, education is a tool for developing and maintaining a healthy environment and has the potential to reform the society. Environmental education supports all people, even children, to acquire information and develop values, skills, and behaviors that will help them meet their current day-to-day needs without compromising the well-being and benefit of future generations.

The roles assigned to education in the field of environmental protection and preservation are

justified along a number of premises. Currently, governments alone are not able to deal with the challenges in protection and preservation of the environment, and clearly, there is a need for active participation and collective support of every member of the society. Education is not only a main strategic tool, but it is more important than policies and the process of legislation or law enforcement. Education can address the root causes of problems related to the environment and the values that affect people's behavior towards the environment. Dealing with environmental preservation challenges requires making choices which may have a direct or indirect impact on the environment. Education supports citizens to make informed decisions to contribute to solving environmental problems.

Environmental protection has been recognized not only as an inseparable part of sustainable development, but also as a basic value needed by today's generation as well as future generations (Jabbour, 2015). Most expressions of instability such as inappropriate use of energy, exploitation and destruction of natural resources, poverty, population growth, and pollution are deeply rooted in environmental issues, making sustainable development an inevitable course of action for governments (Zhu et al., 2017). Consequently, legal bodies, decision makers, and other stakeholders are actively engaged in integration of an environmental dimensions in their planning and policies for developments (Digiacomio, 2017).

Protection of the biosphere is not possible without the participation of all countries and people. For this reason, the principle of public participation in protecting the environment has been emphasized in international legal documents, including the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 (Renwick et al., 2013). An analysis of these documents gives three basic components for public participation. These components are the right of access to environmental information, public participation in the decision-making process, and access and appeal to administrative and judicial authorities in the field of environment (Jabbour et al., 2013). The levels of environmental education based on the

environmental education charter of Ramsey, (1992):

1. environmental knowledge and awareness: awareness of the entire environment and its issues, development of the ability to understand and recognize and use this ability in different fields,
2. acquiring a set of values and feelings related to the environment and the motivation to participate in its preservation and improvement,
3. acquiring the skills needed for diagnosis and investigation,
4. participation in solving environmental issues and debates, and
5. helping students to gain experience in using the acquired knowledge and skills to perform positive and thoughtful actions to solve environmental problems.

Conclusion

Today, improving the quality of the environment is considered as an integral component of sustainable development. The successful experience of pioneering countries in environmental issues shows that to protect the environment, first of all, human groups should be trained so that they are aware of, responsible towards, and active in preserving the habitat. According to UNESCO, to achieve the goals of environmental education, educational methods should be used that are problem-oriented and provide opportunities for the participation of the audience as much as possible in the learning-by-doing process. People are needed to be actively involved in solving problems, and they should be encouraged to join practical activities for the benefit of the environment. Schools can play an important role in delivering environmental education to students and increasing their awareness of the need to follow a life style that protects the environment and preserves the natural resources. Environmentally-oriented educational activities in schools can start with those directed at preserving and improving the green spaces in the educational setting, i.e., schools by engaging the kids in decision making

and solving problems, scientific excursions, and visits to the nature with the purpose of valuing the environment and acquainting them with the

relevant challenges in preserving the environment.

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