

Education Environmental Education as an Approach to Enhance Awareness of Sustainable Development: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract:

In recent decades, the growing challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequality have sparked a global call for transformative approaches to sustainability. Central to this call is the recognition that education—particularly environmental education—plays a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes, values, and behaviors necessary for fostering a more sustainable future. By cultivating ecological consciousness and promoting responsible citizenship, environmental education emerges as a key tool not only for individual awareness but also for collective action. It provides a framework through which societies can engage with the pressing demands of sustainable development in a holistic and inclusive manner.

This study will begin by defining the core concepts related to environmental education and sustainable development, then move on to analyze the sociological context that explains the potential role of environmental education in promoting societal awareness of sustainability issues. Finally, it will shed light on environmental education as a structural and societal mechanism for achieving sustainable development across its environmental, economic, and social dimensions

Key words: Environmental Education, Promotion, Awareness, Sustainable Development, Sociological Perspective.

Introduction:

The contemporary world is witnessing rapid transformations in its environmental, social, and economic structures due to excessive technological advancement, unbalanced industrial growth, and increasing consumption of natural resources. These developments have led to the emergence of serious environmental crises that threaten the stability of societies and the sustainability of life on Earth. In the face of such challenges, the concept of sustainable development has imposed itself as a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework aimed at achieving a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. However, realizing this developmental model cannot be achieved through policies and institutions alone; it primarily requires a transformation in

the social, cultural, and behavioral awareness of individuals and communities—making environmental education an urgent necessity and a collective responsibility.

Today, environmental education goes beyond the mere teaching of environmental concepts or raising awareness of natural hazards. It is a social process that contributes to reshaping the relationship between humans and their environment by instilling new values based on responsibility, respect, solidarity, and environmental justice. From this perspective, environmental education transcends its narrow pedagogical dimension to become a mechanism of socialization that interacts with social and cultural structures and contributes to shaping behavioral patterns and guiding social action toward sustainable environmental choices. This is where the importance of the sociological perspective emerges, as it enables a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between education and social reality and reveals the cultural and symbolic systems that either foster or hinder environmental awareness.

The sociological approach to environmental education focuses on analyzing the interactions among institutions such as schools, families, media, and civil society—viewed as social institutions that reproduce culture, transmit values, and shape attitudes toward the environment. It also examines the structural factors (such as social class, cultural level, and geographic location) that influence individuals' reception and engagement with environmental discourse. This perspective contributes to understanding how environmental education can evolve from being mere informational content into a comprehensive societal project that fosters cultural transformation toward sustainability.

From this standpoint, this research aims to address environmental education as a strategic entry point to promoting awareness of sustainable development, through a sociological lens that analyzes the social and cultural dynamics accompanying this educational process and highlights the symbolic and structural dimensions that influence the production and reception of environmental discourse within society. It also seeks to identify the structural and cultural challenges that may hinder the effectiveness of environmental education in achieving its objectives—whether in terms of content, communication channels, or societal reception.

Accordingly, this study will begin by defining the core concepts related to environmental education and sustainable development, then move on to analyze the sociological context that explains the potential role of environmental education in promoting societal awareness of sustainability issues. Finally, it will shed light on environmental education as a structural and societal mechanism for achieving sustainable development across its environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

First: Definition of Concepts

1-Environmental Education

Environmental education is a crucial tool in addressing global environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and ecosystem degradation. Despite repeated international recommendations and the increase in environmental policies, the implementation of environmental education in educational institutions still faces several obstacles. Among these challenges are the weak commitment of teachers and schools, the absence of a clear environmental vision in curricula,

and a lack of environmental school activities and community involvement. Studies show that many schools do not integrate environmental values into their vision and mission, nor do they allocate sufficient resources to raise environmental awareness inside and outside the classroom. In light of growing environmental challenges, it becomes essential to reconsider the sustainability of environmental education programs and to activate the role of teachers as agents of change by training and encouraging them to integrate environmental issues into curricula and activities.

In this context, environmental education is defined as an educational process aimed at developing awareness, knowledge, and positive environmental behavior among individuals, contributing to the consolidation of sustainable values and the adoption of environmentally responsible lifestyles. This type of education is based on cognitive, skill-based, affective, and behavioral outcomes, and seeks to bring about tangible changes in learners' behavior—such as reducing their carbon footprint, improving waste management, and choosing environmentally friendly products. To explain the relationship between environmental education and behavior change, certain theoretical models have been adopted, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by American psychologist Icek Ajzen. This theory illustrates that adopting pro-environmental behavior is influenced by three main factors: the individual's attitude toward the behavior, social norms, and the perceived ability to perform that behavior. Several applied studies have also highlighted the importance of involving the community in environmental programs and linking environmental education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasizes the urgent need to examine the sustainability of implementing such education and the expectations of stakeholders within the school environment (Husin & et al, 2025, p. 2).

In this context, environmental education is considered a multidimensional field about which educators and intellectuals have varying perspectives, whether in terms of intended goals, educational methods used, or the types of activities and resources applied. Given the vastness and diversity of this field, it is essential to approach it with a comprehensive understanding that enables the evaluation of its effectiveness and the identification of its strengths and limitations, with the aim of making informed future decisions. This study seeks to review the educational contexts in which environmental education is implemented, analyze the roles it plays within educational institutions—especially schools—and assess the extent to which these roles are being fulfilled. It also aims to explore how different environments, in both developed and developing countries, shape the nature and direction of environmental education.

To enhance conceptual clarity and avoid confusion caused by the interchangeable use of terms such as environmental education, environmental studies, and environmental approach, it is necessary to present a clear and specific definition of environmental education in this context. Environmental education is defined as an educational process aimed at empowering individuals to acquire environmental awareness, develop a sense of responsibility, and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and interact positively with the natural environment. This process contributes to preparing citizens capable of making responsible decisions for protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development. Environmental education targets all segments of society, from students and out-of-school children to community leaders, policymakers, and the general public, focusing on key issues such as understanding ecosystem functioning, promoting sound environmental behavior, and developing the skills needed to confront current and future environmental challenges (Rethi.M & Sivasekaran. K, 2025, p. 159).

In fact, environmental education has evolved over time to become an essential part of school curricula worldwide. It is an organized learning process aimed at raising environmental awareness and teaching individuals how to manage their behavior and ecosystems sustainably. The concept of environmental education is not limited to formal schooling; it also includes educational efforts directed at the public through various mediums such as printed materials, websites, and media campaigns. Environmental education aims to equip individuals with the necessary knowledge about the environment and the challenges associated with it, to develop the skills needed to address these challenges, and to foster attitudes that encourage informed decision-making and responsible actions to protect the environment.

Environmental education focuses on several key areas as defined by UNESCO, such as raising awareness and sensitivity toward environmental issues, providing knowledge and understanding of environmental challenges, and promoting attitudes that support environmental preservation. It also contributes to developing the skills needed to mitigate environmental problems and encourages community participation in environmental programs. In this context, outdoor education serves as an effective means to extend and enrich this type of learning, where environmental education is taught through hands-on outdoor experiences, enhancing understanding and direct interaction with the environment (Karama, 2016, p. 2).

In the same semantic context, environmental education is defined as an educational process aimed at developing comprehensive knowledge and understanding of natural, physical, and human environments through a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on enhancing individuals' awareness and appreciation of nature and the environment. It serves as an effective educational tool to transform learners—particularly students—into environmentally conscious citizens and leaders capable of making informed decisions that promote a sustainable lifestyle. Environmental education is also employed in various community contexts to strengthen societal resilience, encourage voluntary participation, and improve environmental quality. Moreover, it plays a vital role in environmental management, environmental planning, and environmental health and safety. This form of education also contributes to raising environmental awareness, protecting natural resources and ecosystems, and enhancing environmental consciousness within society.

In recent years, environmental education has gained increasing attention due to the growing awareness among individuals of environmental issues and climate change, fueled by widespread media coverage that highlights global environmental risks. The desire to reconnect with nature in the midst of a fast-paced modern lifestyle has also revived this awareness, as environmental education helps restore the human-nature connection and fosters a deeper understanding of the environment's beauty and importance. These trends have had a positive global impact, with more people committing to sustainable environmental practices such as reducing energy and water consumption, promoting recycling, and spreading awareness about environmental protection to others. This, in turn, strengthens the prospects of achieving comprehensive and effective environmental protection through broad community participation (Masalimova & et al, 2023, p. 1).

Based on the aforementioned body of knowledge, environmental education can be procedurally defined as a structured and continuous educational process aimed at developing individuals' environmental awareness and enabling them to understand the complex and interdependent relationships between humans and their natural and social surroundings. This is achieved through a

multidisciplinary approach that integrates natural, social, and human sciences. The process involves equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to adopt responsible behaviors toward the environment and make informed decisions that contribute to the protection of natural resources, the preservation of ecological balance, and the achievement of sustainable development. Environmental education also seeks to foster a spirit of initiative and active environmental citizenship, and to encourage both individual and collective participation in addressing environmental challenges through educational and awareness-raising programs that emphasize interaction, observation, and practical engagement.

2- Sustainable Development

The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) included two key concepts for a proper understanding of sustainable development: "basic needs" and "environmental limits." The concept of "needs" refers to the essential requirements that must be met for the poorest people in the world, calling for their highest priority. The idea of "limits" focuses on the capacity of the global ecological system to meet the needs of both present and future generations, in accordance with technological advancements and social organization. The report also addressed the importance of maintaining social equality between generations, which includes preserving resources for both the current and future generations. The Brundtland Report did not introduce new discoveries, but it became a pivotal document that shaped the future discourse on sustainable development.

In June 1992, sustainable development was globally recognized at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where "Agenda 21" was adopted, laying the foundation for a new social and economic system leading to a new environmental era. This conference introduced a new dimension to sustainable development: the "institutional dimension" or "governance," reflecting the necessity to guide environmental policies within an institutional and organizational framework. Since then, the concept of sustainable development has become an essential part of discussions on social and economic development worldwide. Today, most countries support the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were officially adopted in 2015, serving as a political agenda for implementing policies aimed at achieving sustainable development globally (BAUM, 2021, pp. 16- 17).

Sustainable development is a complex concept that integrates two fundamental dimensions: development and sustainability, both of which preceded the emergence of the modern concept. While some researchers argue that development and sustainability may conflict in practical application, others, such as Sachs (2010), affirm that true development cannot be achieved without sustainability, and sustainability cannot be ensured without development. Historically, the notion of development was linked to imperialism and colonialism, serving as a tool for political and economic dominance. Classical development theories defined development as economic growth achieved through a transition from traditional agriculture to modern industrial production. In contrast, modern theories—such as Romer's endogenous growth theory—emphasize that knowledge, innovation, education, and information technology are the main drivers of growth. These theories stress the importance of investing in human capital and research and development to create a stimulating environment where individuals can live long, healthy, and productive lives (Klarin, 2018, p. 68).

On the other hand, sustainability refers to the capacity to maintain systems and resources without depleting them, allowing human activities to continue over the long term without harming the environment or threatening natural balances. Researchers emphasize that sustainability cannot be separated from its environmental context, as ecosystems form the foundation for human survival and the continuity of human activity. Therefore, environmental sustainability has become the essential reference framework through which other forms of sustainability—such as social and economic—are evaluated. In this light, sustainable development is defined as an integrated process aimed at improving the quality of life for present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by balancing economic growth, social equity, and environmental preservation.

Sustainable development is a comprehensive concept that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions within a unified framework aimed at meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability cannot be reduced to the environmental aspect alone, despite the prominence of environmental challenges in current discussions. These challenges are deeply intertwined with social and economic crises. For instance, environmental disasters such as droughts can trigger population movements that reshape demographic balances and create socio-economic tensions across borders. Therefore, sustainable development requires a holistic approach that takes these interdependencies into account, as illustrated in Raworth's Doughnut Economy model, which emphasizes the importance of social justice within the planet's ecological boundaries. Moreover, major environmental changes like rising sea levels threaten coastal cities and lead to significant human and economic losses, necessitating balanced developmental policies based on an integrated understanding of sustainability dimensions (Fischer & et al, 2023, pp. 18- 19).

In this context, sustainability should be viewed as a comprehensive system encompassing three key dimensions. First, the environmental dimension, which raises questions about the ability of ecosystems to meet human needs without harming their regenerative capacity or resilience. Second, the social dimension, which focuses on equitable resource distribution, enhancing social cohesion, and ensuring equal opportunities for participation—factors essential for social stability and the development of human capital. The third is the economic dimension, which concerns the efficient use and management of resources to achieve economic well-being and ensure long-term growth. Achieving sustainable development requires balancing these three interrelated dimensions and treating them as interconnected components forming the foundation of any sound developmental decision that meets human aspirations while safeguarding the environment.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This concept emphasizes the establishment of a strong, healthy, and just society by meeting the needs of various segments of both present and future communities, promoting individual well-being, social cohesion, and equal opportunities. Sustainable development serves as a framework for making informed decisions on issues that affect people's lives—such as urban planning that ensures easy access to healthcare and recreational facilities, and the promotion of more sustainable food systems. Moreover, viewing the world as an interconnected system in terms of both space and time helps us understand that environmental issues or economic decisions in one

region can impact other areas and future generations, thus underscoring the importance of long-term planning (OSUNTUYI, 2021, p. 223).

From a sociological perspective, sustainable development is closely linked to the social and economic structure. Less developed countries, in particular, face numerous structural obstacles that hinder the achievement of this type of development. Among these challenges is the short-sightedness of government policies, which often prioritize immediate basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education, with little regard for long-term vision. Corruption further undermines the continuity of development initiatives, in addition to a lack of funding and the absence of qualified personnel due to weak educational systems and the emigration of skilled individuals. Added to this are geopolitical challenges, such as the imposition of economic sanctions, which obstruct the exchange and utilization of modern technologies. Hence, there is a pressing need to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account social justice and formulates long-term strategies to confront these overlapping challenges.

Based on the above, sustainable development can be procedurally defined as a comprehensive and ongoing process aimed at achieving an integrated balance between environmental, social, and economic dimensions in order to meet the needs of individuals and communities in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This process involves the adoption of long-term policies and strategies based on the rational and equitable use of natural resources, the promotion of social justice, and the realization of inclusive economic growth. Sustainable development also focuses on building strong and cohesive societies capable of adapting to environmental and social changes, empowering individuals in decision-making, and ensuring overall well-being that goes beyond material aspects to include quality of life, education, health, and active participation in public life.

Secondly– The Sociological Context Explaining the Role of Environmental Education in Promoting Awareness of Sustainable Development.

Environmental education is one of the most important educational and social tools that contributes to shaping individuals' and communities' awareness regarding environmental issues and sustainable development. It instills values, knowledge, and skills related to the preservation of natural resources and addresses increasing environmental challenges. From a sociological perspective, environmental education plays an integrative role that connects knowledge with social behavior and helps reshape consumption patterns and the relationship between humans and their environment. Its role goes beyond environmental awareness to fostering collective consciousness that supports community participation in environmental protection and promotes responsible and solidaristic engagement with environmental causes.

In this context, environmental initiatives—such as the celebration of Earth Day, the integration of environmental education into school curricula, and the organization of outdoor activities in natural settings—are effective tools for promoting positive environmental behaviors from an early age. These activities also help reinforce collective awareness and critical thinking among learners, ultimately fostering responsible and sustainable attitudes toward the environment. By emphasizing experiential and interactive learning, environmental education empowers individuals to understand the

interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic issues and to make informed decisions that support sustainable development both locally and globally (Vladova, 2023, pp. 4- 5).

Based on this perspective, the theory of ecological modernization stands out as one of the most prominent contemporary sociological approaches that reconsiders the relationship between development and the environment. Emerging in the 1980s as a scientific response to radical environmental discourses that called for the dismantling of modern structures such as capitalism and the centralized state, the theory argues that achieving sustainable development does not require the abolition of modern institutions, but rather their reorientation toward environmental goals through the integration of ecological rationality into production and consumption systems. As societies progress toward a "post-industrial" phase, cultural and organizational patterns become more responsive to environmental values, with governments, corporations, and institutions striving to reduce negative ecological impacts through technological innovation and effective regulatory policies. Thus, a gradual compatibility between the demands of capitalist growth and environmental protection becomes conceivable, without the need to sacrifice economic development (Burns, 2016, pp. 887- 888).

In this context, environmental education emerges as a key sociological mechanism for enhancing individual and collective awareness of the importance of sustainable development. It goes beyond merely transmitting environmental knowledge to shaping individuals' thinking and behavior within modern society, thereby strengthening their active participation in the desired institutional and ecological transformations. As a means of environmental socialization, education contributes to building an environmental culture grounded in "ecological rationality" and promotes the formation of social alliances that support environmental policies. This, in turn, accelerates the integration of environmental values into the broader modernization process. Thus, within the framework of ecological modernization, environmental education is not merely an awareness-raising tool, but a fundamental agent in the dynamics of societal change toward more sustainable and environmentally just modes of production and consumption.

The sociocultural approach views environmental education as a participatory learning process that emerges from social and cultural interaction within the environment in which the individual lives. From this perspective, environmental learning does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped through dialogue and shared experiences with others—whether within the family, at school, or in various community spaces. Through these interactions, environmental awareness is gradually constructed, reflecting the prevailing values and practices in society, which are either reproduced or transformed toward more sustainable patterns (Wheaton & et al, 2024, p. 1195).

In this context, environmental education emerges as a collective learning mechanism that contributes to the development of awareness about sustainable development through the sharing of meanings, experiences, and knowledge. Peers, teachers, and social actors play a fundamental role in guiding the learner toward a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment. Environmental knowledge is not simply acquired through rote learning but is built through social and communicative activities that integrate language, symbols, and local cultural contexts, thereby enriching the learning experience and making it more relevant to the learner's reality.

In this sense, environmental education, within the sociocultural approach, contributes to empowering individuals to develop their environmental competencies in a way that is rooted in their social contexts and reinforces their sense of belonging and collective responsibility toward the environment. It provides a space for joint reflection and collaborative action, where daily practices are reshaped to align with the goals of sustainable development. Thus, environmental education becomes a transformative process that integrates knowledge, values, and action within the social and cultural fabric of both the individual and the community.

Furthermore, the socio-environmental approach developed by Kyburz-Graber, Häberli, and Hirsch has also emerged as an innovative perspective in the field of environmental education. Through their research and interdisciplinary projects, these scholars have contributed to shifting the traditional view towards a critical and participatory approach. Since the early 1990s, particularly in the Swiss context, this orientation has established itself as an educational framework that values contextual experience and interaction between various actors in the school environment, while rejecting standardized educational solutions that overlook the specificities of learners and local communities (Kyburz-Graber & et al, 2006, pp. 103- 104).

This educational orientation is based on a sociological view that asserts environmental issues are inseparable from the fabric of social relationships and cultural values. Therefore, it is not enough to simply convey information about what is "right" or "wrong" in environmental behavior; rather, it is about empowering learners to critically examine and analyze the daily reality in a multidimensional way. Through open class discussions and field projects, students gain the ability to understand how unintended environmental practices arise and perceive the interests and values that drive them, thereby establishing a collective consciousness that is participatory and socially aware.

In this context, environmental education becomes a central sociological tool to promote the principles of sustainable development. It creates participatory dialogue spaces where environmental meaning is redefined interactively. The school then becomes a democratic platform that allows students to formulate their own worldviews and develop their skills as active citizens, capable of contributing to the development of fair and inclusive environmental policies, in line with global goals for sustainability and environmental and social justice.

Thirdly - Environmental Education as a Mechanism for Achieving Sustainable Development

Environmental education is one of the most important mechanisms contributing to achieving sustainable development, as it provides new generations with the opportunity to learn about behaviors that help preserve and develop the environment. This is done by teaching them the principles of environmental conservation and providing theoretical knowledge and social attitudes that contribute to enhancing environmental awareness. As social beings, humans must be aware of the impact of their actions on the environment and adopt sustainable behaviors, which requires continuous and transformative environmental education, both culturally and socially.

The educational process in the field of the environment requires collaboration among various social actors, such as the family, schools, and social institutions. The family remains the primary factor in shaping the environmental attitudes of young people, as raising children in an environmentally responsible family environment affects their future behavior toward the

environment. Moreover, schools play an important role in promoting environmental knowledge, as educational curricula contribute to the development of early environmental awareness that extends into later stages of education. However, the influence of the social environment and media cannot be ignored, as the media helps shape positive environmental attitudes in individuals from an early age (Veselinovska, 2023, p. 40).

Through studying the social actors in environmental education, it becomes clear that schools, families, and social institutions form key pillars in shaping individuals' environmental attitudes. These activities work together to become the main foundation for building environmental awareness in new generations. Therefore, it requires a comprehensive educational approach that goes beyond traditional teaching and takes into account the social factors influencing the upbringing of young people and guiding them toward sustainable environmental practices. Developing these environmental attitudes requires coordination and cooperation between different social institutions, whether familial, educational, or community-based, to ensure the establishment of proper environmental values and enhance social responsibility toward the environment.

From a sociological perspective, environmental education is a key tool in shaping societal awareness and achieving sustainable development. It is not limited to spreading scientific knowledge about environmental issues, but extends to instilling ethical values that influence individuals' behavior toward the environment. Environmental education aims to shift the prevailing economic mindset to one that focuses on ecological balance and resource sustainability. A society that develops a strong environmental culture is better equipped to address environmental challenges and achieve a balance between economic progress and environmental preservation (Karpan & et al, 2020, pp. 106- 107).

By activating environmental education within the educational system and society as a whole, environmental ethics are strengthened, encouraging coordination between individual and collective interests in environmental conservation. This transformation requires the integration of efforts between educational institutions, families, and civil society, as environmental education promotes both individual and collective responsibility in addressing environmental issues. This shift in societal awareness contributes to building a sustainable community that recognizes the importance of preserving the environment as part of the development of shared human values, thus supporting sustainable development at all levels.

It is worth noting in this context that education is a long-term investment aimed at improving the well-being of future generations by developing their skills and capabilities, contributing to the economic and industrial progress of society. In this framework, the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) approach serves as an effective strategic tool, where environmental and local cultural issues are integrated into the curriculum in alignment with the needs and challenges of the community. According to this approach, education is implemented in an interdisciplinary and holistic manner, with a focus on student-centered learning, where the teacher acts as a facilitator, encouraging students to be active and responsible participants in their learning process. It also promotes systems thinking, helping students understand environmental complexity, connect various issues, and seek solutions to problems threatening sustainability (Permanasari & et al, 2021, p. 2).

The integration of environmental education within the framework of sustainable development enhances values of participation and responsibility in environmental decision-making, contributing

to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By promoting extracurricular learning activities, the ESD approach helps develop students' collaboration, communication, and independence skills. It also emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning without geographical or cultural boundaries, enhancing individuals' ability to face environmental challenges through sustainable knowledge and practices. This approach strengthens the role of environmental education as an effective mechanism for achieving sustainable development, contributing to the creation of a comprehensive environmental awareness that reflects the interaction between local culture and global environmental issues.

Overall, education for sustainable development is a fundamental mechanism for achieving a balance between environmental, economic, and social dimensions. It is based on building a collective awareness rooted in respect for nature, resource preservation, and the promotion of intergenerational justice. This educational approach aims to instill, from an early age, human and ethical values that enable individuals to make environmentally responsible decisions and adopt conscious behaviors in their daily lives. Education—whether formal in academic institutions or informal through media, organizations, and the local community—seeks to develop environmental sensitivity, establish a critical culture that re-evaluates habits and attitudes, and reinforce personal commitment to environmental issues. In this way, environmental education becomes an integral part of the comprehensive development of the individual's personality, contributing to the formation of a citizen capable of understanding environmental challenges, responding positively to them, and working toward a sustainable future (CIEPIELA & et al, 2022, pp. 48- 49).

In this context, educational institutions play a pivotal role in activating the concepts of sustainable development by integrating environmental education into curricula, utilizing non-traditional learning spaces such as parks and gardens, and encouraging students to engage in hands-on environmental activities. The development of environmental values is not limited to theoretical knowledge but also requires daily practices that translate awareness into sustainable behavior. An individual's awareness of their belonging to both the environment and society enhances their sense of responsibility and ability to create a positive impact, even through small-scale initiatives. Every environmentally friendly behavior is a building block in the construction of a more sustainable society, and when these actions are repeated on regional, national, and continental levels, they can lead to tangible results that benefit both present and future generations. Therefore, investing in education for today's youth is a crucial step toward achieving comprehensive and integrated sustainable development.

Conclusion:

In light of the profound transformations the world is experiencing today—due to climate change, environmental imbalances, and escalating social inequalities—environmental education emerges not merely as a cognitive or technical tool, but as a key lever for fostering cultural and behavioral transformation at both individual and societal levels. From a sociological perspective, environmental education transcends its educational dimension to become a space for the reproduction of values and the reconstruction of the relationship between humans and nature within a framework of collective awareness and shared responsibility.

According to this vision, environmental education plays a crucial social and cultural role. It contributes to the formation of a system of sustainable environmental values and behaviors, and

instills in individuals a deep awareness of the interdependence between environmental and social phenomena. This leads to a broader understanding of environmental degradation as a product of unjust economic and social structures. Thus, environmental awareness does not develop in isolation from social and cultural conditions; rather, it is shaped within societal contexts where education, culture, public policies, and daily life practices interact.

From this standpoint, environmental education becomes a mechanism for deconstructing environmental and social inequalities by involving marginalized groups in environmental discussions and enhancing their capacity to influence and participate in decision-making. It also serves as an entry point for establishing the concept of environmental citizenship, which goes beyond rights to include ethical commitment and responsibility toward future generations and the shared environment.

In a world characterized by complexity and interconnectivity, achieving sustainable development requires a fundamental shift in modes of thinking, living, and interacting—a shift that cannot be realized without a structured educational effort that is deeply embedded in the social fabric. Therefore, investing in environmental education is an investment in social and cultural capital, and in building a society capable of adaptation, accountability, and environmentally and socially responsible decision-making.

Based on the above, environmental education from a sociological perspective is not merely an additional component of the educational system; it is a strategic entry point for fortifying societies against future crises and ensuring a gradual transition toward a more just and sustainable developmental model. It is, indeed, a call to reframe our relationship with the natural world, with ourselves, and with others—on the basis of understanding, solidarity, and shared responsibility.

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