



Importance of Environmental Education in Social Studies now and the Future

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Abstract: The main purpose of this paper was to evaluate the importance of environmental education in social studies as a type of education that teaches the required abilities and competencies to deal with environmental issues, as well as nurture perceptions, possible motives, and responsibilities to make knowledgeable choices as well as take proactive steps on environmental protection. The research methodology employed for the paper was analytical using conceptual and literature review. Findings revealed that environment education is very important and can be used as a panacea for rectifying numerous environmental problems and achieving sustainable development. This can be achieved through exploring the link between Social Studies and environmental education. A major application of the study is that the findings if applied will promote the teaching of environmental education in Social Studies and by extension the sustainability of the environment now and in the future. The emerging dimensions of environmental education in Social Studies viz a viz its objectives, especially at the elementary Junior Secondary School level and how it can be used in reducing negative behavior towards the environment are areas of contribution to knowledge. Therefore the paper recommended that; Social Studies should be used as the pilot for actualizing environmental education now and in the future.

Keywords: *Environmental education, social studies, importance, environmental skills and values.*

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INTRODUCTION

Humans have always needed a form of education, as it has always been an integral element of the mechanism through which people can become well-suited to their environment. Students of all ages require education but where and how much they can accomplish is one of the most basic requirements of education. As a result, education at all levels, formal and informal, is critical to the long-term well-being of humans and the effective management of environmental concerns. Vincent, Ikpesu, and Dakare (2022) argued that we all know that human-caused environmental problems, like global warming and the degradation of the earth constrained capacity, are on the rise. This has led to a consensus that ecological combination therapy is imminent if we must continue our interactions with the environment as usual.

Environmental Education (EE) was developed within the conceptual framework that emerged from the first international conference held in Tbilisi in 1977 and is now seen as education for environmental sustainability. This

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allowed EE to address the broad range of issues and concerns included in Agenda 21 and others which evolved through the meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development (Unesco, 2020). According to Environmental Protection Agency, EE is a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving, and take action to improve the environment. As a result, individuals develop EE per understanding of environmental issues and gain the skills to make informed and responsible decisions.

Environmental Education (EE) is a cross-curriculum topic promoting global awareness, sustainable living, and active citizenship. It involves a structured and planned process that seeks the implementation of the environmental curriculum of Social Studies in educational institutions at different levels (elementary school, Junior Secondary school, Colleges, university, and post-graduate levels). The United Nations (UN) stressed the importance of making EE mandatory to achieve SDGs. As a result of people becoming more aware of environmental problems, there has been an increase in national, regional, and international discussions about EE. When asked about the origin of EE, Boeve-de Pauw, Gericke, Olsson, and Berglund (2015) cited the International Union for Sustainability of Nature and Natural Resources as well as Abbas and Singh, (2014) both claimed EE came to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There has been an improvement in EE since the 1970s (Olanrewaju & Iroye, 2018). Tbilisi, Georgia, hosted the first Intergovernmental Conference on EE in 1977, which declared that EE was essential for a self-sustaining future and questioned that it should be instilled in human existence to generate a better quality of life and the environment.

Uchekwue (2018) described EE as a systematic process of identifying principles as well as contextualizing to acquire the abilities essential to comprehend and respect the interrelated nature between human beings, their cultures, and their natural environments. EE as a process of increasing awareness that improves people's information and consciousness about the surroundings and the challenges involved. EE evolves the required abilities and competencies to meet the issues, as well as nurture perceptions, possible motives, and responsibilities to make knowledgeable choices as well as take proactive steps on environmental protection.

Onuegbu (2015) noted that EE goals should be on how to help people and social groups become more conscious of the bigger picture and the interconnectedness of the issues they face; to assist people with knowledge of fundamental awareness of the environment and the difficulties it brings with it, as well as a range of experience in dealing with it. Others are encouraging the development of an environmental ethic, as well as the urge to participate in environmental development and conservation, among organizations and people; support the development of environmental problem-solving abilities in the society, organizations, and humans and facilitate the proactive involvement of humans and society in addressing environmental issues at all scales.

Researchers on the subject of EE generally agree that the ultimate purpose of EE is to impact behavior and foster civic engagement. That is why spreading the word about the dangers of environmental deterioration and unrestrained depletion of environmental resources is so important. It is no surprise, then, that EE is being touted as a long-term solution for the SDGs, as it encourages people to see ecological cleanliness and personal well-being as intertwined (Obiajulu & Ogheneakoke, 2023). Onuegbu (2015) posited that EE could help people to have a fundamental understanding of the environment, cultivate a good outlook, and build an alliance with it, all of which will reduce or eliminate negative consequences on the environment.

Alexandar and Poyyamoli (2014) advocated for an effective EE through active teaching in Social Studies to achieve sustainable development of the environment. A definition of EE describes the understanding of environmental data, ideas, and abilities that one acquires through capabilities or expertise. Based on this discourse, we might assert that EE is very important to us and should be multilevel and continuous. At first EE should be targeted using special subjects such as Social Studies. Secondly, the focus should be the elementary and Junior Secondary schools. With the view of catching them early.

Objectives of the Paper

The main objective of this paper was to analyze the importance and aims of EE through Social Studies now to enhance environmental sustainability in the future. The paper adopted an analytical research approach, using an extensive analysis of concepts and related literature on EE and Social Studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bank (2020) said that "The environment is the biophysical space we live in." Therefore the primary objectives of EE should be to make people more aware of how the environment is doing and to teach them how to act in a way that

is good for the environment. This shows that everyone needs to know how to keep the environment healthy not only for this generation but also for generations to come. On the other hand, it teaches people how to weigh the pros and cons of different sides of an issue and improve their ability to solve problems. [Akinrinmade \(2021\)](#) pointed out best environmental practices as some of the main ideas and characteristics of good EE. EE looks at the environment as a whole, including its biodiversity, global ecosystems, future technologies, social science, aesthetics, as well as natural structures, ([Olawuyi, 2020](#)). EE also looks at the spiritual side of how people interact with the environment, as well as the physical side ([Davis, 2020](#)).

[Babalola and Olawuyi \(2021\)](#) argued that EE is one way to move toward a world that is both environmentally and relationally productive. They noted that EE focuses on getting people involved in identifying and controlling difficulties they encounter with the environment. While [Olawuyi \(2020\)](#) added that it discourages people from passively gathering input from the environment and it should make people feel more responsible for the environment and give them more involvement and confidence to fix it. ([Zhou, Rudhumbu, Shumba, & Olumide, 2020](#)), EE concentrates on how things are now and how they will be in the future, while [Omotor \(2004\)](#) added that environmental education goes beyond the separation of understanding, abilities, and perceptions by trying to get people to continue taking actions that can lead to environmental sustainability. [Castellanos and Queiruga-Dios \(2022\)](#) and [Kopnina \(2018\)](#) explained how environmental education can lead to sustainability and conservation of the environment. [Essien \(2018\)](#) investigated how environmental education strategy can change the attitude of rural people towards their environmental resource conservation attitude. Similarly, [Iwunna and Nkwocha \(2021\)](#) advocated for care for the environment. [Obiajulu and Ogheneakoke \(2023\)](#) claimed that EE can assist in the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals. The literature reviewed above made strong emphasis for the importance and adoption of environmental education now as a way of securing the future of the environment.

Environmental Education (EE)

EE is loaded with affective overtones, its curricular structures consist of programs significant to effective education. It esteems learning that cater to individuals nature and interests. It could be said therefore that the concept consist of feelings, and the process concerning affective domain which are similar to the thought processes which is involved in teaching and learning Social Studies. EE addresses personal ethics, private experiences and values. The goal of EE is to foster affective concern towards the environment. EE assists individuals to demonstrate affection in practical ways so far as such affection is psychologically and intellectually defensible. In a bid to instill affection into learners, certain objectives have become imperative in the teaching-learning process. Thus the following objectives can be formulated to enhance learners affective skills through environmental education. To acquire certain attitudes, feelings, and sensitivities including development and acceptance of certain beliefs, interests, outlooks, and pre-dispositions; to develop skills particularly social skills, which are very necessary for an effective use of knowledge gained through learning processes and to acquire and foster values including many deeply held commitments supported when necessary by appropriate actions.

The acquisition of awareness portrays the individual's ability to recognize environmental problems ([Ezeudu, 2003](#)). Interest is demonstrated by paying attention to certain environmental issues or problems. And to accept responsibility by a person reflects that he has adopted such attitudes that urge him to be well-informed about what goes on in the society and willingness to operate within the limitations of democratic procedures and this results in the motivation of an individual to act.

The skills of interaction such as unity cooperation, group consciousness, and harmony are inculcated into the learners through EE. Therefore, we need an educational re-orientation situated in African culture. Educational and sustainable management of natural resources, and the environment.

The strategy of environmental education and analysis is the pathway for individuals to develop eco-friendly behavior through environmental education. Environmental protection in Nigeria has long been established in the Nigerian laws and formal institutional structure to address the various environmental problems faced in the society ([Adepoju, 2014](#)). Nigeria's environmental protection efforts have existed since the British colonial rule in the 1900s through their by-laws. Some of these laws and regulations promulgated on environmental issues included the Criminal Code of 1958 that controlled burial in houses thereby curbing issues of water pollution; the Public Health act of 1958 which aimed to control the spread of disease, and slaughtering of animals; the Forest Ordinance of 1937 which led to the establishment of various forest reserves in the country ([Sanyang, 2016](#)). These laws were noticed to be poorly implemented and

enforced by the government. Also during this era, the education sector (schools) had some elements of environmental protection through the inclusion of environmental content in Biology in the schools in the colonial era. However, the environment studied was of the British society and not that of the local Nigerian environment. It was not until the 1950s that the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) developed a syllabus that was used in teaching Biology in schools and this syllabus contained environmental contents such as soil conservation. Thereafter, environmental contents were taught in schools in the form of hygiene and nature study in the 1960s to follow the emphasis of nature study as a subject in the international scene (Eheazu, 2016). Though nature study and hygiene were taught in Nigeria primary and secondary schools, the content was merely based on the happenings in British society.

Consequently, there was a curriculum revision effort that took off at the beginning of the 70's making way for the inclusion of more environmental education topics in the Biology syllabus such as pollution and water conservation. After all these achievements have been recorded, more work needs to be done to establish a solid foundation for EE in Nigeria. Minimal awareness was observed among the populace in the country on the effect of pollution on the health of individuals especially in the 1970s when concern was shifted to oil pollution, especially in the Niger Delta wetland of the country and this resulted in protests due to the economic and ecological damages caused by such pollution scenes: This led to the establishment of the petroleum refining regulation act of 1974. Meanwhile, even with the protest and other efforts made to promote EE in the country, more efforts are needed to create a solid root for EE.

The main goal of environmental education is to develop concern and awareness among the world population about the total environment and its associated problems. This requires a commitment to work individually and collectively towards a solution of current problems. Pandey (2020) described the aims of environmental education as, to improve the quality of the environment; create awareness among the people on environmental problems and conservation; create an atmosphere in which people can participate in decision-making, and develop the capabilities to evaluate the environmental programs. In a similar vein, Ezeudu (2003) posited the following objectives of EE, to create awareness among social groups and individuals; acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems; have knowledge on variety of experiences and acquire a basic understanding of the environment, and its associated problems. Other objectives of EE include, to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of attitudes, values, and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection. Also EE people acquire skills of identifying and solving environmental problems and participating actively at all levels towards the resolution of environmental problems.

In addition, Obiajulu-Anyia (2015) asserted that EE provides opportunities for children to build skills that will make them become environmentally smart, problem-solving and investigative. Hence Obiajulu-Anyia (2015) submitted ten aims of EE, as follows: first, imagination and enthusiasm are heightened, EE is hands-on, interactive learning that sparks the imagination and unlocks creativity. When EE is integrated into the curriculum, students are more enthusiastic and engaged in learning, which raises student achievement in core academic areas. Secondly, learning transcends the classroom, not only does EE offer opportunities for experiential learning outside of the classroom, but it also enables students to make connections and apply their learning in the real world. EE helps learners see the interconnectedness of social, ecological, economic, cultural, and political issues. Thirdly, critical and creative thinking skills are enhanced, EE encourages students to research, investigate how and why things happen, and make their own decisions about complex environmental issues. By developing and enhancing critical and creative thinking skills, EE helps foster a new generation of informed consumers, workers, as well as policy or decision-makers.

Furthermore, tolerance and understanding are supported, EE encourages students to investigate varying sides of issues to understand the full picture. It promotes tolerance of different points of view and different cultures. Fifthly, state and national learning standards are met for multiple subjects, by incorporating EE practices into the curriculum, teachers can integrate science, math, language arts, history, and more into one rich lesson or activity, and still satisfy numerous state and national academic standards in all subject areas. Taking a class outside or bringing nature indoors provides an excellent backdrop or context for interdisciplinary learning. Also Bio-phobia and nature deficit disorder decline, by exposing students to nature and allowing them to learn and play outside, EE fosters sensitivity, appreciation, and respect for the environment. It combats "nature deficit disorder" ... and it's FUN! Again, healthy lifestyles are encouraged, EE gets students outside and active and helps address some of the health issues we are seeing in children today, such as obesity, attention deficit disorders, and depression. Good nutrition is often emphasized through EE and stress is reduced due to increased time spent in nature.

Eighthly, Communities are strengthened, EE promotes a sense of place and connection through community

involvement. When students decide to learn more or take action to improve their environment, they reach out to community experts, donors, volunteers, and local facilities to help bring the community together to understand and address environmental issues impacting their neighborhood. In addition, responsible action is taken to better the environment, EE helps students understand how their decisions and actions affect the environment, and builds knowledge and skills necessary to address complex environmental issues, as well as ways we can take action to keep our environment healthy and sustainable for the future. Service-learning programs offered by PLT and other EE organizations provide students and teachers with support through grants and other resources for action projects. Finally, students and teachers are empowered, EE promotes active learning, citizenship, and student leadership. It empowers youth to share their voice and make a difference at their school and in their communities. EE helps teachers build their own environmental knowledge and teaching skills.

Environmental Education and Social Studies

Social Studies Education as an academic discipline develops the knowledge of students on different spheres of the environment, through the teaching of skills, values, actions and attitudes that are considered sustainable in students relationship and interaction with the environment. In an attempt to define social studies, a cup of tea made using water, Lipton, sugar, and milk being that the aforementioned ingredients give the tea its unique taste. The same applies to social studies which sieve relevant concepts, skills knowledge, attitudes aspirations, values, and aesthetics from other disciplines to form its concept. Social Studies could be defined as a tool for the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that will help influence individuals and society at large. A broad study of human relationships, the environs of human institutions, humans to other animals and elements. This explains that the subject encourages attention to be given to the process of living and working together, using the environment to meet basic human needs, customs, institutions, values, life situations and cultural heritage.

Social Studies is an integrated subject that draws its content from a wide range of social science subjects. Social Studies focuses on human beings and their relationship with their environment. That is the interactions and interactive effects of humans in/and their environment (Atubi, 2020). From the perspective of this definition Social Studies education is an arm of environmental education. That is environmental education is extended through the study of Social Studies. The interactions of humans with his physical, social, and psychological environments and solutions to problems accruing from such interactions are the main focus of Social Studies this implies that proper infusion technique can be accepted in teaching EE concepts within the Social Studies curriculum.

The ability to create awareness on areas of mans misuse of the environment or areas where the environment is negatively influencing mans work and inculcating appropriate knowledge, skills values, and attitudes on how to extricate humans from such problems is the focus of EE. This means that EE can be extended through the study of Social Studies now and in the future.

According to Ogundare (2003), Social Studies is a study of problems of survival in an environment and how to find solutions to them. Social Studies as a study that equips the youths with the tools necessary to solve personal and community-related problems". Thus, Social Studies is not only aimed at giving out knowledge, but it equally emphasizes on inculcating a certain distillate knowledge which will assist humans in acquiring the tools necessary for protecting their environment. Such tools are knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills. These tools are expected to assist the learner in solving both personal and community-related problems. Social Studies can therefore be described as a discipline that attempts to modify or change the learners' behaviors in the direction of acceptable values and attitudes through a process of studying human beings and their relationship with their environment.

Furthermore, it helps in the desire to provide solutions to various complementing problems to ensure mans survival, having been equipped with the necessary tools such as values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Ogunyemi, 1994). As a social science subject, it is more inter- disciplinary, concerned with skills development and more normative. It is a field of study in which content focus on relationships. It provides knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills that enable people to understand better their physical and human environments to act or behave as responsible citizens.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the analytical research method was employed, given the fact that the paper presents an analysis of a problem, which is the importance of Environmental Education in Social Studies now for sustainable environment in the future. The analysis was carried out using conceptual and literature review. Data collected was secondary data from

related and relevant studies and documents on the major variables discussed in the paper. These data were collected from the internet, Journal articles, Annual Reports from international agencies such as the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO). Information from these sources were collected and utilize in the analysis presented in this paper.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The result from the conceptual and literature review showed that EE is a widely spread concept not only in Social Studies and it has a direct link with the attainment sustainable environment. Also the review showed that the concepts is of interest special to educators and researchers. It was discovered that EE is significant and its achievement can help in achieving the sustainable development Goals (SDGs).

Secondly, findings from the conceptual analysis and literature review, suggests that there exist a strong relationship between EE, Social Studies and future sustainability of the environment. Therefore, the knowledge of EE can help protect the land, air and water in our cities and communities. It will affect how people treat the environment in our cities and communities by preventing many negative attitudes such as blockage of natural and man-made drainage channels, improper waste disposal and disallowing pollution. These attitude and behaviors will help in breaking many complexities associated with achieving sustainable environment in the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper explained the importance of EE in social studies now to the achievement of environmental sustainability in the future, by helping students make informed and reasonable decisions concerning their environment. The discussion revealed that to tackle environmental problems in Nigeria and globally, it is evident by all means to design a systematic process that requires changes in traditional education programs. Social Studies education is reasonably responsible for getting involved in adequate educational efforts that enable EE to help in achieving environmental sustainability. Therefore, the Federal Government of Nigeria, research concerns, institutions, organizations, and governing bodies responsible for education should make efforts to boost the development of EE in Social Studies.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study has some practical implications because if environmental education is properly incorporated into Social Studies education especially at the elementary and junior secondary school level, it will boost environmental conservation and sustainability. This is because the younger generation will be armed with the knowledge, skills and behavior that are needed in dealing with the environment.

However, the study has a major limitation, it was based on conceptual and literature review on the major variables, and the authors believe that an empirical study on the topic could have been better but due to time and financial constraint this was not possible. Therefore an empirical research on related variables of the paper can be investigated by other researchers as further studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EE should be adopted as powerful tools for empowering young people on adopting more environmental responsible attitudes and behaviors now that can help in achieving sustainable environment in the future.

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