

**FORMATION OF ECOLOGICAL CULTURE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
THROUGH INTRODUCTION TO NATURE**

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Abstract: This article examines the role and importance of introducing children to nature in developing environmental awareness in older preschool-age children. The study analyzed effective pedagogical methods for developing environmental knowledge, skills, and abilities in children. Particular attention is paid to developing the key components of environmental awareness through observing natural phenomena, caring for flora and fauna, and appreciating the beauty of nature. The article provides recommendations for using games, experiments, and practical activities in exploring nature with children.

Keywords:

environmental awareness, preschool education, introducing children to nature, environmental education, observation, environmental games, practical activities, sustainable development.

Introduction

Global climate and environmental challenges, biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity require society to take decisive action toward sustainable development. An effective and long-term solution to these challenges is early exposure of the younger generation to environmental culture. The preschool period (ages 3–6) is an important stage in social and behavioral development, and this period is considered particularly suitable for the formation of environmental habits and values. This article analyzes the theoretical and practical foundations for developing environmental culture in preschool-aged children, effective teaching methods, the latest innovations and experience, and provides practical recommendations.

Ecological culture is a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, a combination of knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors related to environmental protection. For preschool-aged children, this concept should include such elements as a love of nature, responsibility, careful use of resources, waste reduction, and respect for flora and fauna.

The main goal of such educational processes is:

- developing an emotional and practical attitude toward the environment in children.
- applying environmental habits (saving water, recycling, caring for plants) in everyday life.

- teaching environmental phenomena not theoretically, but practically – developing an intrinsic motivation for learning.

Introducing preschoolers to nature is an educational tool for developing a healthy attitude toward nature and an understanding of real-world knowledge about the environment based on emotional experience.

Preschool age is an important stage in the formation of future personal and social values. During this period, children begin to develop an interest in nature and a sense of love and concern for the environment. Given the growing environmental challenges of modern globalization, fostering environmental awareness from an early age has become a pressing issue.

Environmental awareness is an integral part of environmental education, and its integration into preschool education is a pressing issue. Therefore, if parents don't provide their children with environmental education at home, lessons taught in preschools will be insufficient. Consistent educational measures are essential for developing environmental awareness. Developing environmental awareness in elementary school students is crucial not only through psychological and emotional impact but also through fostering a love of nature and appreciation for its beauty. Environmental awareness instills in students skills and abilities such as caring for and preserving nature. This instills in each student a sense of responsibility, an understanding of their duty to society and humanity, and a connection with nature.

Methods and organization of the research

Environmental education lessons in preschool educational institutions should utilize modern teaching technologies, online information, and include fairy tale and cartoon characters. Everything depends on the teacher's environmental knowledge and their ability to convey this knowledge to their students. Knowledge without skills will not achieve the main goal. Despite the current high demand, there is still no new specialized discipline that would provide comprehensive environmental knowledge for secondary school students. Environmental education is a general pedagogical issue encompassing universal positive norms within the "Nature-Society-Human" complex. Overall, environmental education in secondary schools serves as an important mechanism linking ideological, moral, political, aesthetic, economic, legal, and other areas of education.

The primary method for effectively organizing environmental education for older preschool-age children is direct exposure to nature, that is, observing natural processes, caring for plants and animals, and teaching them to appreciate the beauty of nature. For children to correctly perceive natural phenomena, it is necessary to guide their perception of nature. Without introducing children to nature and using it extensively in preschool educational work, it is impossible to successfully achieve the comprehensive development of preschool children-mental, aesthetic, moral, and physical. Children's acquisition of knowledge about nature should be closely linked to their cognitive abilities-sensory perception, logical thinking, attention, speech, observation, interest in knowledge, etc. To develop thinking and foster a scientific worldview, it is necessary to introduce children to natural phenomena, teach them to understand observed objects and phenomena, and also guide them to an understanding of the connections and relationships between them. Cause-and-effect relationships and relationships between natural phenomena in the process of understanding them develop thinking.

Russian and international researchers have presented numerous approaches to fostering environmental awareness from an early age in their research on this topic. In particular, the cognitive theories of L.S. Vygotsky and J. Piaget, and E. Erikson's stages of social development serve as methodological foundations in this regard. Furthermore, the dominant theme in most examples of folk art is respect for nature, its protection, and the preservation of flora and fauna. Among them, the works of such Russian scholars as al-Khwarizmi, Farabi, Beruni, Ibn Sina, and Z.M. Babur beautifully illustrate a love for nature, a caring attitude toward it, and the importance of nature to us. In particular, folk wisdom reflects the need for a healthy attitude toward nature and the environment. For example: "Don't spit in the water!", "Don't throw stones in the well!", "Don't kick the ground!", "Don't throw bread-it will break."

The following methods were used in the study:

- **Observational method** – studying children's attitudes toward nature in natural settings;
- **Interviewing and testing methods** – determining the level of environmental knowledge;
- **Experimental method** – assessing the development of environmental awareness through children's practical activities.

During observations with older preschool-aged children, they become familiar with the characteristic and important features of an object, conduct long-term observations of the growth and development of plants and animals, and seasonal changes in nature. While organizing observations, the teacher continues to teach the children the use of specific methods, following a plan, and independently formulating simple conclusions. In this process, common characteristics of the observed objects and phenomena are identified across a group of objects, significant for a specific activity or activity, and the relationship of the objects to the environment is determined.

Research results and their discussion

Teaching children to see, hear, and perceive objects and phenomena is one of the most important tasks of a teacher. Children often look at two familiar objects and cannot distinguish them from each other. Therefore, when organizing observations, the teacher must find specific objects, describe them, and set specific tasks to answer their questions.

A pedagogical experiment was conducted in several preschool educational institutions in the Tashkent region. During the experimental training, projects such as "Nature Corner," "Ecological Week," and "Save Nature" were organized.

The experiment found that the level of environmental awareness among older preschool-aged children increased significantly. During the sessions, the children:

- learned to distinguish between the stages of plant growth;
- acquired animal care skills;
- were able to develop simple environmental habits, such as recycling, water conservation, and respect for nature.

Furthermore, through games and experiments, the children demonstrated their ability to think independently about natural phenomena (rain, sun, wind). This contributed not only to the development of their environmental awareness but also to their aesthetic and moral development. From time to time, the children worked together as a group to clean up a nature corner; they washed houseplants, cleaned an aquarium, and so on. They completed such tasks simultaneously and in a coordinated manner. Of course, the teacher's guidance was a key part of this process.

Children of this age continue to learn the rules of watering flowers, taking into account the biological characteristics of plants and the transition to winter. They can apply the rules of watering plants based on this knowledge. If necessary, they can also loosen the soil in pots. They also learn that soil can be loosened in different ways. If plant roots are close to the surface, they should be loosened more thoroughly. Children should also learn to feed plants, and at the same time, they can observe that fertilized plants bloom and grow better than unfertilized ones.

Children master new plant care skills and reinforce previously acquired knowledge. They learn to clean small, delicate flowers by spraying them with water. They are taught that plants need air and sunlight. Some plants prefer full sun, while others thrive in the shade. Having mastered this knowledge, children know where to plant flowers.

Conclusion

The results showed that games, experiments, and practical exercises play an important role in fostering environmental awareness through exposure to nature. Properly organized exercises led by a teacher foster a conscious attitude toward nature in children.

To improve the effectiveness of the environmental education system in preschool educational institutions, teachers are encouraged to use modern interactive methods such as "Ecological Quiz," "Ecological Laboratory," and "Mini-Experiments."

In conclusion, fostering environmental awareness in preschool children through exposure to nature develops not only their knowledge but also personal responsibility, compassion, and caring. Environmental education reinforces the concept of "nature is my home" and instills a love for nature in children. Therefore, systematically integrating an environmental approach into the educational process is considered essential.

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