

Ecological Approach to the Upbringings of Preschool Children

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/1724104>**Ismayilova Nigar Ramiz**Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0857-7475>, Nigar.ismayilova@adpu.edu.az*Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, (Baku, Azerbaijan)*

Abstract

This study examines the fundamental principles and practical implementation of the ecological approach in preschool education. The research emphasizes the critical importance of initiating ecological education during the preschool period, as this developmental stage represents a crucial window for forming children's environmental consciousness and basic ecological thinking. The study investigates how emotional connections with nature, combined with structured educational approaches, contribute to children's overall development and environmental awareness. Through analysis of current educational practices and theoretical frameworks, this research demonstrates the significance of integrating ecological education with other developmental areas in preschool education.

The findings indicate that successful ecological education requires a comprehensive approach that combines direct interaction with nature, play-based learning, and age-appropriate educational strategies. The study highlights the vital role of educators in implementing the ecological approach and presents practical examples of educational games and activities that facilitate environmental learning. Additionally, the research explores how the integration of regional components and practical experiences enhances children's understanding of ecological concepts and their relationship with the natural world.

Keywords: preschool education, ecological approach, environmental consciousness, play-based learning, child development, nature interaction

Екологічний підхід до навчання дітей дошкільного віку

Ісмаїлова Нігяр*Азербайджанський державний педагогічний університет, (Баку, Азербайджан)*

Анотація

У даній статті розглядаються основоположні засади та практична реалізація екологічного підходу в дошкільній освіті. У дослідженні наголошується на критичній важливості започаткування екологічної освіти в дошкільний період, оскільки цей етап розвитку є важливим вікном для формування екологічної свідомості та базового екологічного мислення дітей. У дослідженні приділено увагу, як емоційні зв'язки з природою у поєднанні зі структурованими освітніми підходами сприяють загальному розвитку дітей та їхній екологічній свідомості. Через аналіз сучасних освітніх практик та теоретичних засад це дослідження демонструє важливість інтеграції екологічної освіти з іншими сферами розвитку в дошкільній освіті.

Отримані результати вказують на те, що успішна екологічна освіта вимагає комплексного підходу, який поєднує пряму взаємодію з природою, навчання на основі гри та освітні стратегії, що відповідають віку. У дослідженні висвітлено важливу роль освітян у впровадженні екологічного підходу та наведено практичні приклади навчальних ігор та занять, які сприяють екологічному навчанню. Крім того, дослідження показує, як інтеграція регіональних компонентів та практичного досвіду покращує розуміння дітьми екологічних концепцій та їх взаємозв'язку зі світом природи.

Ключові слова: дошкільна освіта, екологічний підхід, екологічна свідомість, ігрове навчання, розвиток дитини, взаємодія з природою

Introduction.

Ecological education should start from preschool age. This is because, at this stage of preschool development, a child experiences emotional impressions of nature, gathers perceptions of various life forms, and the fundamental principles of ecological thinking and consciousness are formed. The initial elements of these are laid during this period.

Ecological education, first and foremost, is the cultivation of humaneness, goodwill, emotional sensitivity, and interest in the surrounding world in children, and this should be done from childhood. Humans are part of the natural world and are subject to the laws of overall development.

Ecological education in early childhood represents a fundamental component of comprehensive child development. The preschool period serves as a critical foundation for establishing environmental consciousness and fostering positive relationships with nature. During this developmental stage, children form emotional connections with their environment, gather diverse perceptions of life forms, and develop the foundational elements of ecological thinking and awareness.

The primary objective of ecological education extends beyond mere environmental knowledge to encompass the cultivation of humaneness, emotional sensitivity, and genuine interest in the natural world. This approach recognizes humans as integral components of the natural ecosystem, subject to universal developmental laws and environmental interdependencies.

Methods.

This research employed a qualitative analysis of existing educational practices and theoretical frameworks in preschool ecological education. The methodology included:

- analysis of current educational programs and practices;
- examination of age-specific characteristics of preschool children;
- evaluation of pedagogical principles and approaches;
- assessment of practical implementation strategies.

Results and Discussion.

The fundamental principles of environmental education include a number of key provisions. The research identified several key principles essential for effective ecological education in preschool settings:

1. Integration with other developmental areas;
2. Age-appropriate methodology;
3. Practical interaction with nature;
4. Regional component incorporation;
5. Play-based learning approaches.

The primary task of ecological education is to help the child see the world, experience its beauty, instill confidence in their abilities, ignite creativity, and develop a joy for life. It is also essential to foster curiosity, develop the ability to compare, analyze, and seek independent answers to questions that arise. At this point, the tasks of a

child's intellectual development should be closely linked to the moral and volitional qualities of the individual, such as perseverance, diligence, responsibility, the desire to achieve high-quality results, as well as fostering kindness and respectful relationships with peers.

Nature is not only a temple of health and aesthetic pleasure but also a powerful ancient source of knowledge and upbringing for humanity.

The beauty of native nature instills patriotism, love for the homeland, and attachment to the place where one lives. The greatest writers, poets, artists, scientists, and composers created their immortal works under the influence of their native nature. Nature inspired them with creative energy and helped them reach heights in science and art. If we cannot teach children to express their love for nature, we can at least help them empathize with this love and open their eyes to the beautiful world of nature.

Ecological education, first and foremost, is the cultivation of humanity, goodwill, emotional sensitivity, and interest in the surrounding world in children. In this regard, the concept of ecological culture should also be formed in children. When organizing work on the development of ecological culture principles, it is necessary to follow pedagogical principles: consistency, clarity, accessibility, taking into account the age and individual characteristics of the children, and seasonality.

It is important to integrate ecological education with other areas of child development, in other words, to form an educational process. Integrated forms of work help avoid overloading children during the day, increase their interest, and create conditions for the development of each child. As a result, the material given to younger children is more effectively absorbed, and their ecological literacy improves.

A comprehensive approach should be taken to the problem of ecological education, including the need to incorporate a regional component into its content. By using accessible, familiar material, children learn the relationships between natural phenomena more easily and quickly. In addition, this contributes to solving the problems of instilling moral-patriotic feelings and fostering citizenship.

It should be noted that interaction with nature should begin not with prohibitions or stories about negative consequences when nature is harmed, but by offering children a model of behavior: what can and should be done. Children also begin to understand that they can do good today, not someday in the future "when they grow up." The vividness of impressions and the emotional coloring of encounters with nature develop the ability to see and observe the beauty of the world around them, awakening the desire to reflect their impressions creatively. It is precisely at this time that children and parents create handwritten books filled with stories and drawings, exhibitions are prepared, ecological stands and newspapers are published.

Ecological education cannot succeed based solely on passive thinking. A crucial condition for successful work with children is the creation of an environment that is used and developed for both educational and recreational purposes. This environment should aim to enhance children's work skills, foster their interaction with nature, and promote ecological knowledge among parents. Such an environment includes ecological and scientific centers, ecological trails, paths leading to nature, games and toys, exhibitions of drawings, photographs, and crafts, printed publications, and illustrated materials (Ismayilova, 2023).

Raising a child in the complex modern world is difficult. Problems related to workload affect parents, which in turn affects children. Interaction with nature is an activity that allows children to develop positive emotional attitudes towards living beings, as well as moral and aesthetic feelings. This interaction helps children better understand and absorb the new knowledge gained through joint activities with educators. Thoughtful and planned work in this direction ensures successful learning outcomes and the development of necessary knowledge and skills.

Considering the age-specific characteristics of preschool children, including their impressionability and emotional sensitivity, it is crucial to cultivate compassion and empathy. As renowned pedagogue V. Sukhomlinsky stated, we should help the child empathize with others' pain as if it were their own. Introducing the child to the world of nature allows them to discover something new every day, develop as an explorer, and embark on a journey back to their roots with every step. The wonders of nature elevate their spirit and strengthen their will.

Creative and constructive activities, aligning the child with nature, society, and themselves, provide psychological stability. They instill the power to overcome obstacles and nurture faith in goodness, justice, beauty, truth, and love.

The content of ecological education for preschool children includes knowledge related to various sections of scientific ecology. For instance, in the preliminary main program "World of Discoveries," children are introduced to the concept that everything in nature is interconnected and that humans are part of nature. The program also aims to develop initial ideas about how living organisms interact with the environment. (The World of Discoveries, 2012).

However, greater opportunities for ecological education come not from the specific ecological content of programs or groups but from the educator's ability to implement an ecological approach in teaching.

The ecological approach involves incorporating ecological aspects into most of the topics discussed with children, understanding the relationship between studied objects and human behavior and activities. S. Nikolaeva states that the concept of "ecological education for

preschool children" includes the "ecological approach," which is based on fundamental pedagogical principles. This approach introduces children to nature through ideas and concepts from ecology. (Nikolaeva, 2002).

In the same work, S. Nikolaeva includes sections such as "Ecological Approach to Understanding the Diversity in Living Nature" and "Ecological Approach in Simplifying Concepts About Diversity in Living Nature." Clearly, the use of the ecological approach extends beyond these examples.

Almost any topic in natural science, and sometimes even in social sciences, can encompass an ecological component. For instance, when studying a plant, not only its appearance and structure are considered, but also how environmental factors such as humidity, light, and temperature influence its growth and development. Similarly, when studying natural habitats, discussions include not only the climate, flora, and fauna characteristics but also how organisms adapt to environmental conditions.

Age-specific characteristics of preschool children's attitudes toward nature are also essential factors to consider in the context of an ecological approach. These aspects are crucial in children's education. After birth, a child is unable to recognize themselves or their surroundings. Even Jean Piaget noted that the primary feature of a preschool child's perception of the world is egocentrism. A child does not clearly distinguish between themselves and the world around them, between the subjective and objective, and they project their own motivations onto the events in the world. As a result, the child attributes their own characteristics to objects and events in the surrounding environment.

Once a child begins to understand the difference between their "self" and the objects and events around them, they still, for some time, do not divide the world into natural, artificial, and social categories. Children transfer human relationships to the world of nature and objects, personalizing them. This anthropomorphization is evident when they attribute certain human qualities to objects and natural phenomena, such as "the sly fox" or "the timid rabbit." These types of relationships persist primarily among younger school children and often continue later.

In the early stages of a child's development, teachers encourage this anthropomorphization of nature, fostering empathy toward animals and plants: "Don't touch the kitten – it feels pain like you," or "Don't break the branches – it hurts the plant."

One example of a play situation is when a teacher suggests that children respond to a telegram they've received.

"We were green trees, and we were broken. Everyone who doesn't care about the forest is breaking us. We're even afraid to be the first to bloom in the forest. What's the point? They'll just break us again. Help us! It really hurts when we are broken! A lot!"

Your green friends: Willow, Bird Cherry, Forest Lilac.”

(From V. Bianchi’s “Telegrams from the Forest”).

When working with preschool children, environmental information is introduced into the content of games based on the humanization of nature. An example of a play situation similar to the one described above.

A teacher reads a telegram from the forest.

“I need help! Urgently! Bugs have climbed the trees and chewed everything. In the winter, they burrowed two meters underground, and now they are attacking the trees. I’m working for two, but I still can’t handle it—there are too many of them. I urgently need help! Please tell the children. Quickly. Your Woodpecker.”

Here, the children begin to understand the relationship between birds and insects, as well as the ecological role of woodpeckers.

Thus, the characteristics of children’s perception of natural objects (humanization, personalization) allow for the integration of ecological education with moral development. Through these play-based activities, children can empathize with nature and better grasp their role in preserving and protecting it.

Conclusions.

This research demonstrates that effective ecological education in preschool settings requires a multifaceted

approach that considers children’s developmental characteristics, learning needs, and environmental consciousness development. The findings indicate that successful implementation depends on:

1. Early Intervention: The importance of initiating ecological education during the preschool period when children are most receptive to forming environmental connections and awareness.

2. Integrated Approach: The necessity of incorporating ecological education into various aspects of the preschool curriculum rather than treating it as an isolated subject.

3. Practical Engagement: The value of hands-on experiences and direct interaction with nature in developing environmental consciousness.

4. Educational Environment: The significance of creating appropriate learning spaces and opportunities for environmental education.

5. Professional Development: The crucial role of well-trained educators in implementing effective ecological education programs.

The research suggests that future studies should focus on: long-term impacts of early ecological education, development of innovative teaching methodologies, integration of technology in environmental education, enhancement of family involvement strategies.

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