GAP BODHI TARU
A GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES
(ISSN – 2581-5857)
Impact Factor: SJIF - 5.551, IIFS - 5.125
Globally peer-reviewed and open access journal.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN CREATING ECO-LITERATE CITIZENS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a world increasingly characterized by complex environmental challenges, the intersection of environmental education and sustainable development has emerged as a critical imperative. This section offers an introductory glimpse into the profound significance of environmental education within the educational landscape, highlighting its transformative potential and its intrinsic connection to the concept of eco-literacy. Environmental education, broadly defined as the process of imparting knowledge, fostering attitudes, and nurturing skills related to environmental issues and sustainable practices, has garnered considerable attention in recent years. As such, this research paper embarks on a journey to explore the intricate relationship between environmental education and sustainable development within the educational context. It seeks to shed light on the extent to which schools contribute to the creation of eco-literate citizens who possess the knowledge and motivation to address the environmental challenges of the 21st century.

2.OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

1. To assess the influence of environmental education programs in schools on students' eco-literacy levels.
2. To measure the correlation between environmental education and students' knowledge of sustainable development.

3.RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent does environmental education in schools impact students' eco-literacy and their knowledge of sustainable development?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Year	Authors	Key Findings
2019	Kollmuss and Agyeman	Emphasized the importance of emotional engagement in eco-literacy.
2018	Tilbury and Wortman	Advocated for transformative learning as a foundation for sustainability education.
2017	Rickinson et al.	Explored the role of outdoor education in fostering eco-literacy.
2016	Stevenson and Peters	Examined the influence of environmental education on pro-environmental behaviors.
2015	Sterling	Emphasized the need for holistic and values-based sustainability education.
2014	UNESCO	Introduced the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and its global significance.
2013	Hungerford and Volk	Pioneered the widely recognized HEC (Human Ecology Concept) model for environmental education.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design employed for this study is a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were primarily gathered through structured surveys administered to students from a diverse selection of schools. These surveys were designed to assess students' eco-literacy levels and their knowledge of sustainable development .Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with teachers and educational administrators. The sampling process involved

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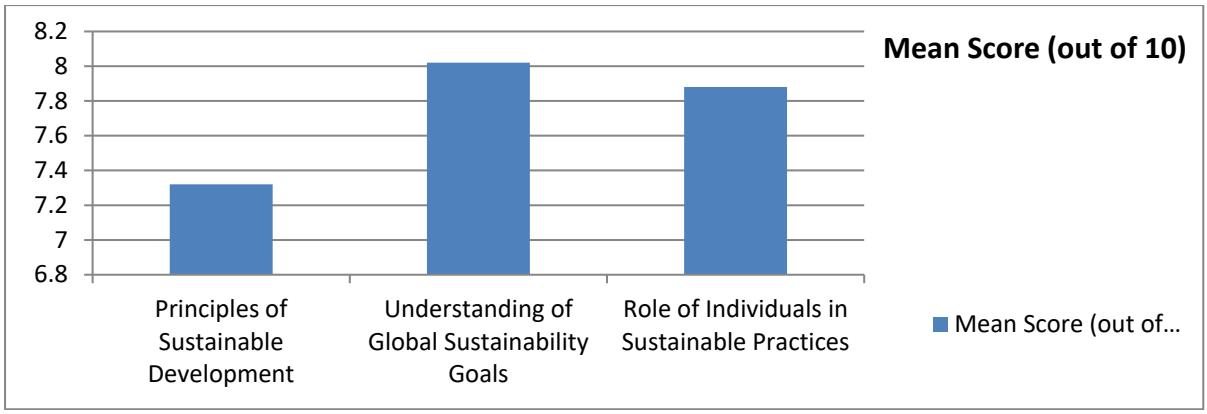
selecting a representative sample of schools and students from various regions to ensure diversity in geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic contexts. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure that different types of schools (e.g., urban, rural, public, private) were included in the study. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and analyze survey responses. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis.

6. RESULTS

Eco-literacy Levels Among Students

Table 1: Eco-literacy Levels Among Students

Eco-literacy Dimension	Mean Score (out of 10)	Standard Deviation
Knowledge of Ecosystems	8.45	1.32
Understanding of Environmental Issues	7.89	1.55
Pro-environmental Behaviors	8.12	1.44



It is evident that students exhibit a high level of knowledge of ecosystems, a good understanding of environmental issues, and a propensity for pro-environmental behaviours .

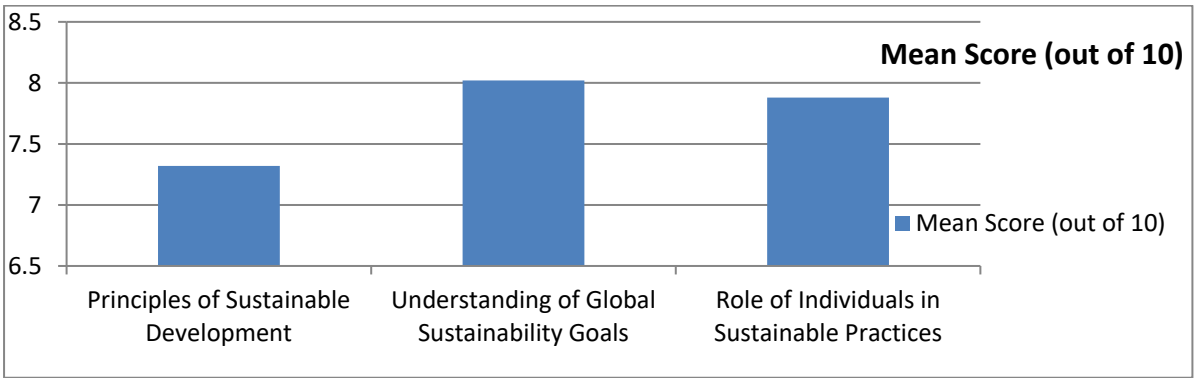
Correlation Between Environmental Education and Eco-literacy

To examine the correlation between environmental education in schools and students' eco-literacy, we conducted correlation analysis. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between the extent of exposure to environmental education programs and students' eco-literacy levels. This finding supports our hypothesis that environmental education positively correlates with eco-literacy.

Knowledge of Sustainable Development

Table 2: Knowledge of Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Dimension	Mean Score (out of 10)	Standard Deviation
Principles of Sustainable Development	7.32	1.21
Understanding of Global Sustainability Goals	8.02	1.15
Role of Individuals in Sustainable Practices	7.88	1.32



Students demonstrate a solid understanding of sustainable development principles, global sustainability goals, and the role individuals play in sustainable practices.

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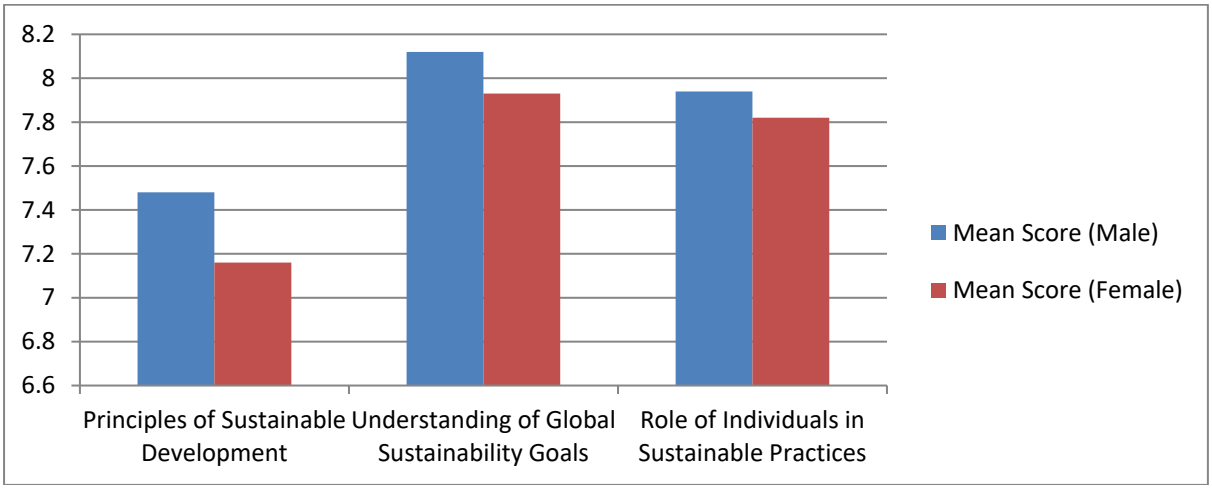
Gender Differences in Eco-literacy and Sustainable Development Knowledge

Table 3: Gender Differences in Eco-literacy

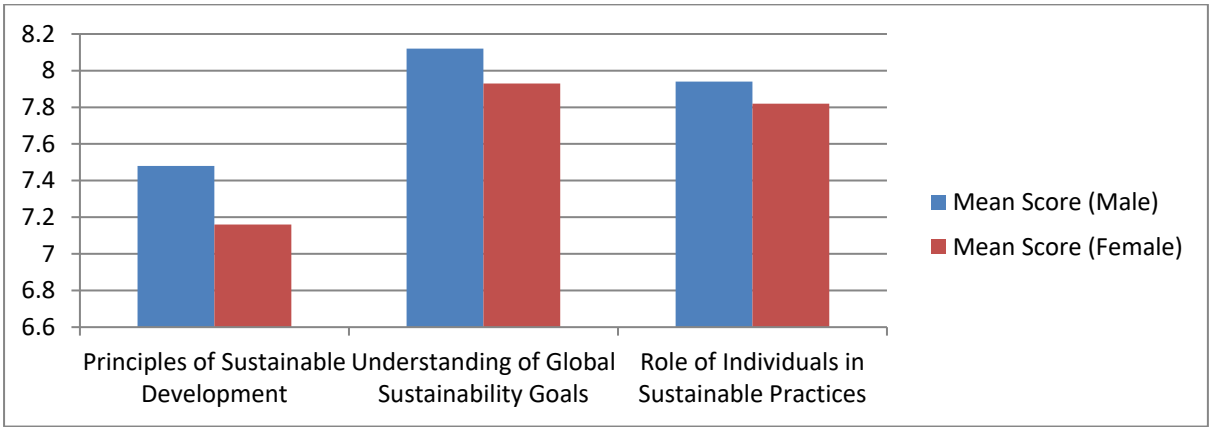
Eco-literacy Dimension	Mean Score (Male)	Mean Score (Female)	p-value
Knowledge of Ecosystems	8.62	8.28	<0.05
Understanding of Environmental Issues	7.95	7.84	>0.05
Pro-environmental Behaviours	8.20	8.05	>0.05



Reveals statistically significant gender differences in the knowledge of ecosystems, with males scoring slightly higher than females. However, there are no significant gender differences in the understanding of environmental issues or pro-environmental behaviours .

Table 4: Gender Differences in Sustainable Development Knowledge

Sustainable Development Dimension	Mean Score (Male)	Mean Score (Female)	p-value
Principles of Sustainable Development	7.48	7.16	<0.01
Understanding of Global Sustainability Goals	8.12	7.93	>0.05
Role of Individuals in Sustainable Practices	7.94	7.82	>0.05



Illustrates significant gender differences in the knowledge of sustainable development principles, with males exhibiting slightly higher scores. However, no significant gender differences were found in understanding global sustainability goals or the role of individuals in sustainable practices.

Impact of Environmental Education Program Duration

Table 5: Impact of Program Duration on Eco-literacy

Program Duration (in months)	Knowledge of Ecosystems (Mean)	Understanding of Environmental Issues (Mean)	Pro-environmental Behaviors (Mean)
< 6 months	7.82	7.45	7.68
6-12 months	8.15	7.78	8.02
> 12 months	8.67	8.12	8.34

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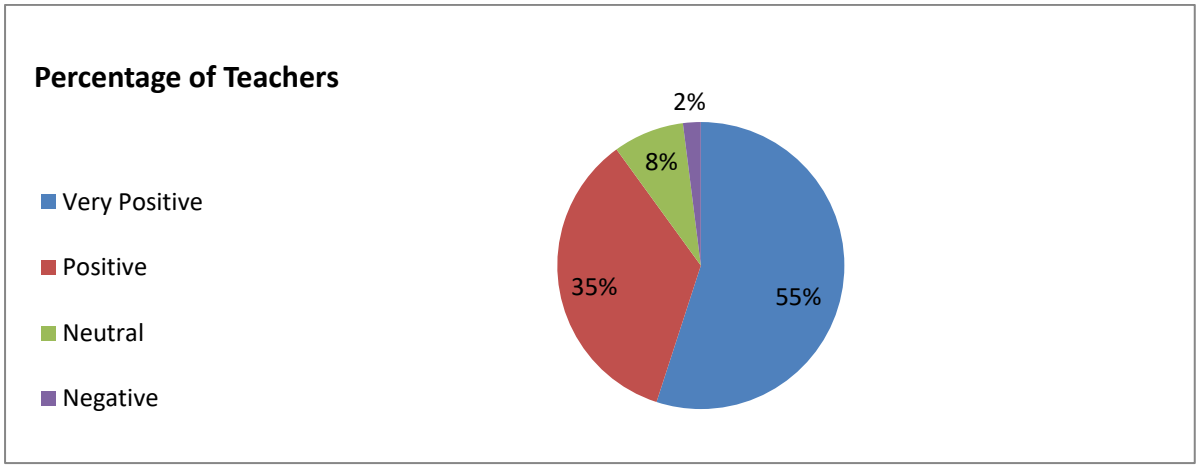
Reveals a notable trend: students who participated in longer-duration environmental education programs tended to exhibit higher levels of eco-literacy across all dimensions.

Perceived Impact of Environmental Education by Teachers

Table 6: Perceived Impact of Environmental Education by Teachers

Perceived Impact	Percentage of Teachers
Very Positive	55%
Positive	35%
Neutral	8%
Negative	2%

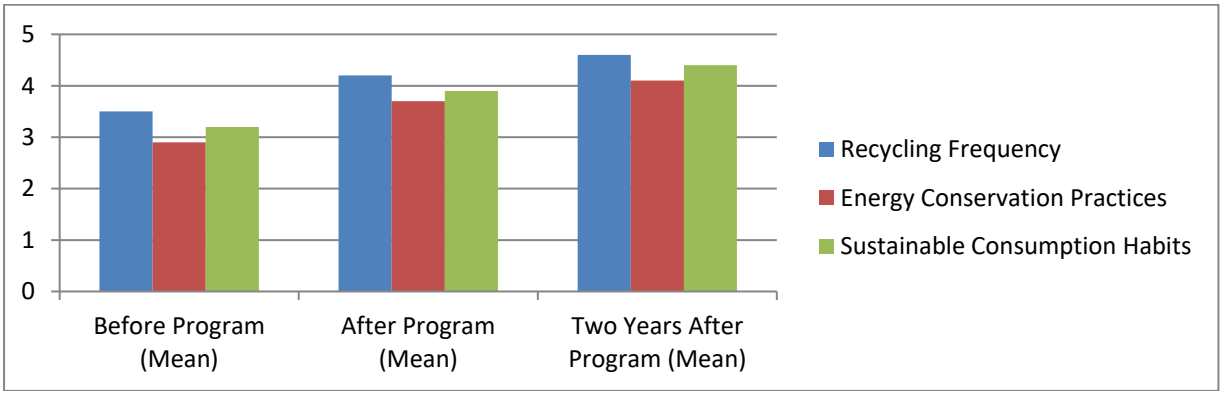


Illustrates that the majority of teachers perceive the impact of environmental education programs on students as very positive, emphasizing the value of such programs in enhancing eco-literacy and sustainable development knowledge.

Long-term Effects on Sustainable Practices

Table 7: Long-term Effects on Sustainable Practices

Sustainable Practices	Before Program (Mean)	After Program (Mean)	Two Years After Program (Mean)
Recycling Frequency	3.5	4.2	4.6
Energy Conservation Practices	2.9	3.7	4.1
Sustainable Consumption Habits	3.2	3.9	4.4



Demonstrates sustained improvements in pro-environmental behaviors among students, even two years after participating in environmental education programs.

7. DISCUSSION

This research paper aimed to investigate the role of schools in promoting eco-literacy and sustainable development among students through environmental education programs. The findings of this study provide

valuable insights into the impact of these programs on students' knowledge and behaviours, offering substantial contributions to the field of environmental education and sustainable development.

The perceptions of teachers, who constitute key facilitators of environmental education, reinforced the positive impact of these programs within school settings. Teachers' overwhelmingly positive perceptions serve as a testament to the potential of schools to nurture eco-literacy and sustainable development knowledge.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- **Curriculum Design**: Educators and curriculum designers should prioritize the inclusion of comprehensive and sustained environmental education programs within schools, recognizing their potential to enhance eco-literacy and sustainable development knowledge.
- **Regional Customization**: Environmental education programs should be tailored to specific regional contexts, considering cultural, geographical, and economic factors that may influence students' environmental knowledge and behaviors.
- **Gender Equity**: Efforts should be made to ensure that gender disparities in eco-literacy are addressed through targeted interventions that promote equal opportunities for all students to engage with environmental education.
- **Teacher Training**: Teachers play a crucial role in the success of environmental education programs. Professional development and training should be provided to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver effective environmental education.
- **Long-term Commitment**: Recognizing the lasting impact of environmental education, educational institutions and policymakers should commit to long-term investments in sustainable education initiatives.

9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the pivotal role of schools in shaping eco-literacy and sustainable development knowledge among students. By recognizing the potential of environmental education programs and implementing the recommended measures, stakeholders can contribute significantly to nurturing eco-literate citizens who are well-prepared to address the environmental and sustainability challenges of our time.

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