



The Relationship between Humans and the Environment in Learning in Elementary Schools

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article history: <i>Received:</i> 2026-02-06 <i>Revised:</i> 2026-04-26 <i>Accepted:</i> 2026-05-01</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Human Environment Relationship, Environmental Education, Elementary School Learning</i></p> <p>This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license. Copyright © 2026 by Author. Published by Yayasan Mujtahidin Sajimah Selong (Musa Foundation), Indonesia.</p>	<p>Elementary school learning plays a strategic role in instilling in students an understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment as an interdependent part of social life. This relationship encompasses natural, social, economic, and cultural dimensions that influence the quality of human life and environmental sustainability. This study aims to describe the nature of the relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning, analyze the reciprocal relationship between the two, and examine the impact of environmental change on human life in the context of education. This study uses a qualitative approach, employing a literature review of journal articles, academic books, and relevant educational policy documents. The results of the study indicate that learning that integrates the relationship between humans and the environment can help students understand, in context, how human actions affect environmental conditions. Furthermore, understanding the impact of environmental change on elementary school learning plays a crucial role in shaping students' awareness, caring attitudes, and sense of responsibility towards the environment. Thus, learning that emphasizes the relationship between humans and the environment serves as an important foundation for character development and sustainable awareness starting from elementary school.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Humans, as God's creatures, possess reason, feelings, and a strong capacity for adaptation. Therefore, their relationship with the environment is highly complex and determines the quality of social life and education. The environment is not merely a backdrop for life, but a unified living space encompassing natural, social, economic, and cultural elements that influence human lifestyles and patterns of social interaction (Banks, 2015). In basic education, particularly through the study of Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS), students are introduced to the human-environment relationship as part of a real-life experience that can shape their understanding of the surrounding environment and society. Learning that integrates aspects of the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment provides opportunities for students to acquire knowledge while developing a caring attitude towards ecological and social sustainability (Supadmini, 2020; Suryani, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of this relationship is crucial in developing critical thinking and environmental responsibility from an early age.

The relationship between humans and the environment is dynamic and interdependent because human activities not only exploit natural resources but also



shape society's social, cultural, and economic conditions. Environmental education in elementary schools helps students understand the relationship between human actions and their impacts on the natural environment and on society's social structure (Ilham et al., 2023; Saputra, 2025). An environment-based learning approach is integrated into curriculum activities to encourage students to consider the consequences of each action and to build greater ecological awareness (Saputra & Ayuni, 2025; Rezkita & Wardani, 2018). In this context, the science subject serves as an important platform for instilling systemic thinking skills and sustainability values relevant to contemporary environmental challenges, such as pollution, climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Several previous studies have emphasized the need to integrate environmental education and social studies at the elementary school level to develop environmentally friendly awareness and behavior among students. For example, a study by Muthi and Sujarwo (2025) found that integrating environmental materials into the social studies curriculum significantly increased elementary school students' environmental awareness through a practical, everyday-life approach. Similar results were also presented by Rezkita and Wardani's (2018) study, which showed that integrating environmental education into elementary school learning can effectively shape students' environmentally conscious character. However, there is still a lack of research that comprehensively discusses how human-environment relations are formed, understood, and applied in science and science learning as a whole. Therefore, studies that connect conceptual understanding with real-world impacts are urgently needed to enrich the elementary education literature.

Based on this description, this study aims to explore and describe the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment in the context of elementary school learning, encompassing natural, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. This article will also analyze the importance of understanding these relationships as part of a meaningful and contextual science and science learning experience for students. The following discussion will present relevant theoretical studies as a further conceptual foundation for elementary school learning.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to examine the relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning. This literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically examine various ideas, concepts, and previous research findings relevant to environmental education and science learning at the elementary school level. This method is effective for building a conceptual framework and theoretical understanding of a topic without involving direct field data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the



context of educational research, literature reviews provide a strong foundation for analyzing learning phenomena in depth and reflectively (Snyder, 2019).

The data sources for this research are national and international scientific journal articles, academic books, and educational policy documents related to the relationship between humans and the environment, environmental education, and science and education learning in elementary schools. Journal articles were selected based on the following criteria: (1) discussing the relationship between humans and the environment in a social or educational context, (2) relevant to elementary education or science and education learning, and (3) published in reputable journals or academically accountable scientific proceedings. Source selection was carried out to ensure that the analyzed data had validity and relevance to the research objectives, as suggested in the educational literature review (Kitchenham et al., 2009).

Data collection techniques were conducted through systematic literature searches using databases such as Google Scholar and national journal portals, with keywords including humans and the environment, environmental learning in elementary schools, and elementary school science. The collected literature was then selected, classified, and analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify themes, patterns, and conceptual relationships that emerged in various sources. This analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically with an emphasis on the meaning of the relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning. The results of the analysis were then synthesized narratively to provide a complete conceptual picture of the role of learning in building students' environmental awareness (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nature of Humans and the Environment in Elementary School Learning

Humans and the environment are two inseparable entities in social life, as human survival depends on the quality of the natural and social environment around them. In the context of primary education, this understanding is crucial because students are in the early stages of developing their perspectives on their relationship with nature and society. Banks (2015) emphasized that social education in primary schools should help students understand the interconnectedness between humans and the environment as part of their lived experiences. This view is reinforced by UNESCO (2017), which places environmental education as the foundation for developing sustainability awareness from an early age, so that students understand the environment not only as a resource but also as a shared living space.

In elementary school, the environment is understood not only as the natural environment but also as the social, economic, and cultural environment that shapes human life patterns. Rezkita and Wardani (2018) explain that integrating environmental concepts into learning can help students understand the role of humans in maintaining a balance between life's needs and environmental sustainability. Through contextual



learning, students can connect human and environmental concepts to everyday experiences, such as water use, waste management, and social interactions in the surrounding environment. This approach aligns with the direction of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful learning through the connection between subject matter and the realities of students' lives (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Understanding the nature of humans and the environment in elementary school learning also serves as a foundation for developing students' attitudes and character. Education is not only oriented towards mastering knowledge, but also towards fostering awareness, responsibility, and concern for the environment. Supadmini (2020) stated that environmental education integrated into elementary school learning can foster caring attitudes and responsible behavior in students. Therefore, introducing the nature of humans and the environment in elementary school learning provides a starting point for students to understand the reciprocal relationship between the two.

The Reciprocal Relationship between Humans and the Environment in Elementary School Learning

The reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning is understood as a process of mutual influence between human actions and the environmental conditions experienced by students in their daily lives. Science learning facilitates this understanding through activities that link students' concrete experiences, such as water use, waste management, and space utilization, with broader environmental concepts (Azima, 2022). Banks (2015) emphasized that social studies in elementary education is effective when it connects students' personal experiences with the social structures and environments in which they live. Similarly, UNESCO (2017) emphasized that environmental education from an early age needs to foster awareness that every human action has interrelated ecological and social consequences.

In learning practices, the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment is also reflected in the social, economic, and cultural dimensions that shape student behavior. Rezkita and Wardani (2018) demonstrated that integrating environmental education into elementary school learning encourages students to understand the relationship between social customs and environmental quality. Through collaborative and contextual activities, students learn that societal norms, values, and customs influence environmental sustainability, while the environment influences patterns of social interaction. This approach aligns with the direction of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful learning through strengthening local contexts and students' real-life experiences (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Furthermore, understanding the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning contributes to the development of responsible attitudes and sustainable awareness. Supadmini (2020) stated that consistently integrated environmental education can foster pro-environmental behavior in students, not just conceptual knowledge. Meanwhile, Snyder (2019) emphasized the



importance of conceptual synthesis in learning so that students can see the causal relationships between human actions and the environment. Therefore, learning that emphasizes this reciprocal relationship provides a foundation for understanding the impact of environmental change on human life.

The Impact of Environmental Change on Human Life in Elementary School Learning

Environmental change has direct and indirect impacts on human life, which, in the context of basic education, needs to be understood contextually by students. These impacts include aspects of health, resource availability, and the quality of social life experienced by children in their daily lives. UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that environmental education at an early age is crucial for helping students recognize the link between environmental change and human well-being, so that learning goes beyond recognizing phenomena to understanding their impacts. In science lessons, introducing issues such as pollution, climate change, and natural resource management serves as a means to develop students' awareness of the consequences of human activity (Azima, 2022).

From a social and cultural perspective, environmental changes also influence the interaction patterns and lifestyles of the communities in which students learn. Rezkita and Wardani (2018) demonstrated that environmental degradation can weaken the values of togetherness and social awareness, while a well-maintained environment supports the development of positive social behavior. Elementary school learning that links environmental change to social realities helps students understand that environmental issues do not stand alone but are intertwined with social life. This approach aligns with Banks' (2015) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of social studies in equipping students with the ability to critically and contextually understand socio-environmental issues.

In the educational realm, understanding the impacts of environmental change plays a role in developing responsible attitudes and character in students. Supadmini (2020) stated that integrating environmental education into elementary school can encourage students to develop sustainable environmentally conscious behavior. Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) prioritizes real-world issues-based learning as a means to foster student awareness and active participation in environmental protection (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Therefore, learning that addresses the impacts of environmental change not only enriches students' knowledge but also leads them to a broader understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment in everyday life, which serves as an important foundation for sustainability education in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between humans and the environment in elementary school learning is an important foundation for building students' understanding of social and



natural life in an integrated manner. Learning that positions humans as part of the environment helps students understand that human survival is highly dependent on the balance of the natural, social, economic, and cultural environments. Through contextual science learning, students are guided to recognize the reciprocal relationship between human actions and environmental conditions, so that the knowledge gained is not abstract but directly related to everyday life experiences.

Understanding the impacts of environmental change in elementary school learning plays a strategic role in fostering students' concern and responsibility for the environment. Integrating environmental issues into learning not only enriches students' knowledge but also fosters the development of critical awareness and sustainable character from an early age. Therefore, learning that examines the relationship between humans and the environment is an effective means of preparing a generation capable of adapting, maintaining environmental balance, and actively participating in sustainable social life in the future.

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