

# Describing Humans and the Environment in Natural Social Sciences Learning in Elementary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between humans and the environment constitutes a fundamental concept in Social Studies education at the elementary school level. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing students' ecological awareness, social responsibility, and environmental ethics from an early age. This article aims to describe the concepts of humans and the environment and analyze their integration into Social Studies learning in elementary schools. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach through document analysis and literature review. The findings indicate that Social Studies learning plays a strategic role in integrating human-environment concepts to foster students' understanding, attitudes, and environmentally responsible behavior. The integration of human and environmental concepts in elementary education not only strengthens conceptual comprehension but also contributes to character formation oriented toward sustainability.

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## INTRODUCTION

Humans and the environment form a mutually influencing relational system: human actions impact the physical and social environment, while environmental conditions shape human thought patterns, values, and behavior. This perspective positions the human-environment relationship not merely as a utilitarian one, but also as a continuous process of socialization and cultural formation. Understanding this relationship is crucial for formulating effective educational interventions, as education plays a dual role as a medium for knowledge transfer and as an arena for socio-ecological character formation.

At the elementary school level, children's cognitive and moral developmental stages are crucial for the formation of fundamental environmental attitudes. Elementary school is a critical period during which habits, norms, and values begin to take root; therefore, environmental education interventions at this stage have significant long-term potential for developing ecologically responsible citizens. Empirical research shows that early environmental education programs can improve environmental literacy, caring attitudes, and pro-environmental behavior in elementary school students. This makes elementary school science and education a strategic subject for systematically integrating environmental learning. National curriculum policies also reinforce the urgency of integrating environmental values into elementary school learning. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages contextual, thematic learning that is oriented toward character development and the Pancasila Student Profile. This essentially requires the implementation of real-life learning projects (reinforcement projects), some of which can be directed at environmental education and the development of 21st-century competencies. In other words, the current policy framework provides a systemic space for instilling ecological competencies through science and education in elementary schools.

However, in practice, a number of recent studies in Indonesia indicate serious challenges: (1) science and natural sciences materials are still largely taught theoretically without a strong local context; (2) limited learning resources and modules that integrate environmental concepts with practical activities; (3) lack of teacher training in environmentally based participatory learning approaches; and (4) limited evaluation that measures changes in attitudes and behavior, not just cognition. This condition creates a gap between knowledge (knowing) and practice (doing) in environmental aspects for elementary school students. Therefore, studies that describe human-environmental relationships while designing practical integration into elementary school science and natural science are needed to close this gap. Globally, the direction of sustainable education (Education for Sustainable Development/ESD) emphasizes that the curriculum must include critical thinking skills, ethical decision-making, and the ability to act for sustainability, skills that are relevant when contextualized at the elementary school level through science and natural science. This international guideline recommends integrated learning that combines scientific knowledge, values, and environmental action skills in students. Adapting ESD principles to the elementary school science curriculum helps students not only understand human-environment relationships, but also be able to take contextual action in the school and home environments.

Primary research findings in several regions in Indonesia demonstrate the positive effects of an integrated environmental learning approach in elementary school science and education: increased environmental literacy, greater awareness, and concrete behaviors such as waste management, water conservation, and involvement in tree-planting projects. These studies confirm that project-based learning models, experiential learning (learning by doing), and interactive media (multimedia/Android modules) are effective in elementary school contexts. Therefore, research that describes the concept of humans and the environment and simultaneously provides guidelines for its integration into elementary school science and education will provide practical contributions for teachers, curriculum developers, and elementary education policymakers. Furthermore, global environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity decline, and pollution, require a generation that not only understands the problems but can take action. Elementary education that internalizes local wisdom

values and sustainable practices can bridge scientific knowledge and local customs that maintain ecosystems. Therefore, this research is not merely academically descriptive; it is directed at developing elementary school science and education learning designs that are applicable, contextual, and in line with the Independent Curriculum policy and ESD principles. Based on the conceptual description and empirical evidence above, the research entitled "Describing Humans and the Environment in Natural Social Sciences Learning in Elementary Schools" is relevant and urgent. This research is expected to: (1) clarify key concepts and their relationships; (2) identify effective elementary school science learning practices to instill ecological awareness; and (3) formulate practical recommendations that can be directly adopted by teachers and schools as part of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and sustainable education efforts. The study will also utilize and reflect on your assignment/task documents as data and implementation examples (initial assignment documents and relevant journal templates) to enrich the local context of the study.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach, which allows researchers to describe and interpret the phenomenon of human-environmental relationships in the context of Social Sciences (IPAS) learning in elementary schools. The descriptive-qualitative approach was chosen because the research objective is to generate a comprehensive and contextual understanding of concepts, practices, and pedagogical implications, rather than to test quantitative hypotheses. With this approach, researchers focus on the meanings, patterns, and conceptual relationships that emerge from documentary sources and relevant literature.

The main data sources of the research consist of two types: (1) academic documents on the theme of humans and the environment compiled as assignments/studies (primary documents uploaded by researchers and teams), and (2) secondary scientific literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, curriculum policies (including the Independent Curriculum document), international guidelines related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and relevant research reports on environmental education at the elementary school level. The initial assignment document, which is one of the primary sources, is analyzed and referred to as a practical example of learning implementation (see source file). Data collection is carried out through documentation studies and systematic literature reviews with the following steps:

1. Primary document inventory: Collecting relevant assignment documents, modules, lesson plans, or academic manuscripts from the researcher's archives (including the original assignment manuscript on "Describing Humans and the Environment").
2. Literature selection: Searching for and selecting the latest scientific literature (preferably within the last 10 years) through academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, national/international journals) with keywords such as "environmental education primary school", "human environment interaction", "education for sustainable development", "elementary science learning", and the like. The selected literature includes empirical articles, literature reviews, and policy documents.
3. Metadata collection: Recording bibliographic information for each source (author, year, title, journal/publisher, short abstract, relevance to the research focus) to facilitate analysis and compilation of a bibliography according to APA 7th.
4. Thematic data extraction: From each selected document, the researcher extracted pieces of text relevant to the analysis domain: (a) definition of the concept of human, (b) definition and components of the environment, (c) forms of human-environment relationships/interactions, (d) examples of implementation of learning in elementary schools, and (e) the impact of environmental education on student attitudes/behavior.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Humans in Elementary School Science Learning**

The results of the study indicate that in the learning of Natural Social Sciences (IPAS) in Elementary Schools, the concept of humans is understood comprehensively as individual beings as well as social beings who have the ability to think, feel, interact, and be responsible for their surroundings. This understanding positions humans not only as biological subjects, but also as social and moral subjects who live in a certain social and environmental order. Thus, IPAS learning is not solely oriented towards mastering social facts, but is directed towards developing students' self-awareness as part of the social and environmental community.

This view is in line with the thoughts of Ki Hadjar Dewantara who emphasized that education is essentially a process of guiding all the natural forces that exist in children so that they are able to achieve the highest safety and happiness as human beings and members of society. In the context of Elementary School Science, guiding children's nature means helping students understand their identity as humans who live side by side with others and nature. Therefore, the concept of human in Elementary School Science cannot be separated from the values of social responsibility, empathy, and concern for the environment. A number of elementary education studies show that when the concept of human is taught contextually and linked to students' daily experiences, then Science learning becomes more meaningful and has an impact on the formation of positive social attitudes. Students not only understand their role as individuals, but also as part of the family, school, and society who have an obligation to maintain social and environmental harmony (Suryadi, 2019; Ningrum et al., 2024). Thus, the concept of human in Elementary School Science learning serves as a foundation for the development of students' social and ecological character.

### **Environmental Concepts in Elementary School Science**

The concept of the environment in elementary school science learning encompasses the natural environment, the social environment, and the cultural environment, which are interrelated and form a system of life. The natural environment includes physical elements such as soil, water, air, plants, and animals, which are the source of human life. The social environment encompasses relationships between people within the family, school, and community, while the cultural environment relates to the values, norms, customs, and habits that develop within a community. These three environmental aspects are studied in an integrated manner in science to help students understand the reality of life as a whole.

According to Emil Salim, the environment is the sum of all objects, conditions, and influences within the human environment that influence its survival and well-being. This definition emphasizes that the environment is not only understood as the physical setting of human life, but also as a system that mutually influences humans and nature. In elementary school science learning, this concept is important because it helps students realize that every human action has consequences for the environment. Recent research in environmental education shows that introducing environmental concepts from elementary school age contributes significantly to increasing students' environmental literacy and environmental awareness (Hastürk et al., 2023; Widyastuti, 2024). By understanding the environment as a living system that must be protected, students begin to develop ecological awareness and a responsible attitude towards nature. Therefore, elementary school science learning plays a strategic role as a vehicle for integrated and sustainable environmental education.

### **Integration of Human and Environmental Concepts in Elementary School Science Learning**

The integration of human and environmental concepts in elementary school science learning is carried out through a contextual learning approach that links material to students' real-life experiences. Studies have shown that learning that connects human concepts with the school and home environment can increase student engagement in the learning process. Students not only learn abstract concepts but are also encouraged to observe, reflect, and practice environmentally conscious behaviors in their daily lives.

This contextual approach aligns with the principle of learning by doing, which emphasizes direct experience as the primary learning resource. In elementary school science and education (IPAS), the integration of humans and the environment can be realized through simple activities such as observing school cleanliness, waste management, utilizing school gardens as learning resources, and discussing the impact of human behavior on the environment. Research shows that environment-based learning and small projects in elementary schools can improve students' conceptual understanding and pro-environmental attitudes (Trianto, 2017; Izhar, 2023). Thus, the integration of human and environmental concepts in elementary school IPAS not only strengthens cognitive aspects but also builds social skills and ecological attitudes. IPAS learning becomes more relevant to students' lives and supports the national education goal of developing individuals with character and environmental responsibility.

### **The Impact of Human and Environmental Learning on the Formation of Student Character**

Science learning that integrates human and environmental concepts has a significant impact on the character development of elementary school students. Studies show that values such as responsibility, caring, discipline, and cooperation can be effectively instilled through learning that connects humans with their environment. When students understand that environmental damage directly impacts human life, they tend to develop wiser attitudes in behavior. Various empirical studies show that environmental education integrated into elementary school science contributes to changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, such as habits of maintaining cleanliness, conserving resources, and working together to protect the school environment (Hadi, 2011; Rangkuti, 2015; UNESCO, 2023). This impact demonstrates that science learning functions not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a medium for internalizing values and character. In the context of basic education, developing an environmentally conscious character is crucial as a long-term investment for sustainable living. Therefore, science and science learning, which integrates humans and the environment, plays a strategic role in shaping a generation with ecological awareness, social responsibility, and the ability to make decisions oriented toward sustainability.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the study and discussion, it can be concluded that humans and the environment are two interrelated and inseparable elements in social life. In the context of learning Natural Social Sciences (IPAS) in Elementary School, understanding the concept of humans as individual and social beings and the concept of the environment as a living system is an important foundation in shaping the attitudes, values, and character of students from an early age. IPAS learning that integrates these two concepts not only serves as a means of mastering knowledge, but also as a vehicle for internalizing the values of social responsibility and concern for the environment.

The study results show that integrating human and environmental concepts into elementary school science learning through a contextual and experience-based approach can strengthen students' conceptual understanding while fostering ecological awareness. Students become better able to understand the impact of human behavior on the environment and develop wise attitudes in their daily lives. Thus, science learning plays a strategic role in supporting the development of a sustainable, environmentally conscious character.

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