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Environmental Education Practices-Evedence From Dindigul' School Children

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Abstract
Learning about environment is important but it is even more important to apply what we learn in our day-to-day life to develop an eco-friendly habit and make a positive impact, on that note starting early is even more important and needed in the world we live in. With an intent to understand the practical (application) dimension of environmental education taught at school this paper focuses on Dindigul school children's daily habits, lifestyle decisions and aspirations for a sustainable future. Multi-Stage Proportionate Random Sampling (MSPRS) approach. The district educational office presented the initial step of data collection that was proceeded in the district's schools situated in all geographical directions (east, west, north and south). In the second phase, two government, two aided and six private schools were chosen from the district's total number of schools. Results show that middle adolescents (ages 11–14) consistently practice eco-friendly behaviors with private school students leading in higher application levels. The findings point out the older the students grow they expressed less dedication and consistency, middle school students were the most engaged in enjoying nature, animal care and sustainable actions. Socio-demographic factors like gender, urban rural background, caste, parental education and employment strongly shaped environmental application, with higher parental education and urban residence linked to stronger ecopractices. Educational support systems also played a key role; student with tuition support, exhibition exposure, participation opportunities and personal motivation reported stronger environmental engagement or weaker application depending on school type. Our findings highlight that the practical side of environmental education is not uniform and show how students actions evolve across adolescence and the important need to keep the spirit and action for environmental sustainability as they grow.

INTRODUCTION

In Environmental Studies, learning is only half the journey the other half or the real impact comes in when students put their knowledge into practicing what is taught and learned. Application based activities like planting trees, recycling waste, saving water and making sustainable lifestyle choices can definitely help them better understand the difference between classroom theory and showing or practicing care for the environment. These practical actions will help not only with awareness but also with effective participation in protecting the planet. Observing and measuring what children actually do rather than only what they know or learn our study strongly reminds the essence of hands-on environmental education in action.

Our study explores the practical side of environmental education: the actions, routines, and lifestyle decisions that reflect a genuine commitment to protecting the planet. The five key domains that are considered to understand a child/student's environmental studies application perspective are tree planting and environmental habits, waste reduction and recycling, nature appreciation and animal care, eco-friendly lifestyle choices and environmental aspirations. The data is collected from different age groups, schools, classes and genders with the intent to understand not just what children know but what they actually do for the planet they live on. The results would help us with the present pattern, gaps and inspiring practices that can guide educators, policymakers and communities in educating the upcoming generation to become environmentally responsible citizens.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Otto, Evans, Moon, and Kaiser (2019) conducted a full investigation in several nations to look at how children's views and behaviors toward the environment evolve. Their study observed that children's environmentally friendly carryout could be reasonably predicted by their emotional connection to their experiences in nature. Environmental sentiments have been found to be more strongly shaped by moral and emotional variables than through cognitive variables. Based on their study building a relationship

with nature at a young age has a big impact on sustainable behavior. These results provide credibility to the idea that children's lifetime growth of environmental responsibility is linked to their emotional connection to nature.

Kroufek, Janovec, Chytrý, and Simonová (2016) looked into preschoolers and parents attitudes toward the environment with the goal to understand how family factors impact early environmental awareness. Results of their study disclosed a slight connection between parents and kids' attitudes toward the environment suggesting that parents opinions and actions influence how young kids view the world. The researchers pointed out the value of parental participation and early education in developing favorable environmental attitudes. They came to the conclusion that for the purpose of nurturing ecological sensitivity from a young age formal preschool programs and home environments should work together.

Liu and Green (2024) ran a detailed examination of the literature on kids' ecological friendly attitude taking in a number of variables that influences or impacts kids eco-friendly behavior. Depending to the review environmental consciousness was mainly driven with parental influence, environmental education initiatives and firsthand encounters with nature. Researchers likewise stressed how social norms and emotional involvement support children for a long time ecological behavior. For educators to successfully encourage environmental responsibility Liu and Green stated the necessity of integrative strategies that bring social, emotional and intellectual components. Their analysis presents thorough guidelines for creating environmental interventions that have an impact on kids.

Bucht, Bachner, and Spengler (2024) researched affective-motivational beliefs and environmental attitudes regarding sustainability in German secondary school students. The research project looked at how students' perceptions of sustainability were impacted through variables consisting of gender, age, type of school, socioeconomic status and amount of time spent in nature. The research results showed that environmentally friendly sentiments were more inclined to be noted with girls, younger students and those who spent more time in nature. Students' socioeconomic status and the kind of school they attended had an enormous effect on how they perceived the environment. The authors stressed the value of fair access to nature and focused on teaching methods to encourage motivation for sustainability among all kinds of student populations.

Ponmozhi and Ranjitha (2023) explored the attitudes of schoolchildren toward the environment to ascertain their level of concern and awareness regarding environmental issues. The study discovered that there are differences due to age, gender and academic background and the majority of students had an average level of optimism regarding environmental issues. The study noticed an imbalance between awareness and active participation even though students shown interest in environmental issues. The authors underlined that environmental education needs to become more interactive and experiential for the purpose to increase student’s commitment to sustainability. They reiterate the importance of early interventions in promoting positive environmental attitudes.

Kirbiš (2023) assessed how parents and their own educational backgrounds shape young people's attitudes they perceive about the environment. Their research found a hopeful association between the educational attainment of their parents and the ecological concern of adolescents. The educational aspirations and achievements of young people also heavily adds value to environmentally conscious viewpoints developments. Researchers have suggested that attitudes toward the environment outside of formal education are molded through the broader educational setting at home. These results highlight the important role of raising environmental awareness through educational and familial channels adding to the generational transmission of values.

Durkan, Güngör, Fetihi, Erol and Ogelman (2016) reviewed the direct nature experiences and environmental attitudes of preschoolers aged five who lived in urban and rural areas. Because of their prevalent and easy exposure to natural environments children in village settings showed a greater familiarity with and a more positive attitude toward nature. Urban children, on the flip side had less exposure which seemed to have a direct impact on their understanding and sensitivity to the environment. The researchers emphasized how early ecological outlooks are influenced by geographical context and proposed that organized naturebased activities in urban preschools could aid in closing this experiential gap.

Li, Zhao, Huang, Deng and Li (2024) explored how preschoolers empathy for nature shapes their environmental consciousness. Children were much more minded to behave in an environmentally conscious and considerate way if they had and express higher levels of emotional attachment and empathetic concern for the environment. Using interactive and observational methods the researchers suggested how emotional attachment to the natural world has had an enormous effect on early ecological

values. The findings seem to be in favor of using empathy-driven teaching techniques in early childhood education to help young children develop a deeper awareness of their surroundings.

Turtle, Convery and Convery (2015) carried out a case study to see how participation in Forest School programs shaped the environmental attitudes of children of age 8 to 11. Stronger emotional bonds with nature and increased environmental awareness can be seen and have been developed from prevalent outdoor education in forest environments. Children who took part in the program showed greater environmental responsibility, curiosity and respect for natural areas. The research brought out and highlighted the importance of immersive outdoor education in encouraging persistent ecological attitudes and the usefulness of alternative learning environments for complimenting and improving traditional classroom learning.

Biber, Cankorur, Güler and Demir (2023) evaluated the differences in attitudes and environmental awareness between children attending public kindergartens and those attending private kindergartens with a nature focus. Children brought up in nature-focused environments showed a notably higher level of environmental awareness and involvement. These children looked into and actively participated in environmental protection because they were more conscious of ecological principles. Attendees of public kindergarten, on the contrary hand indicated less exposure to nature-based learning. In an attempt facilitate noteworthy environmental understanding and attitudes from an early age the authors stressed the value of integrating structured outdoor experiences into early education.

Objectives

- To study the Socio-Economic and Demographic/background characteristics of the respondents/ school students
- To determining factors on the application of environmental studies among school students in the study area

AREA AND METHODOLOGY

Dindigul district as it is the center of the state and is located near Coimbatore it is a welleconomically developed district. Dindigul is a developing district nearer to Tiruchirappalli and Karur district and just 60 kms to Madurai. Therefore, it may be considered as the center of the state and this will be better to analyze and the results may be applicable for the other districts. The study is conducted with the Multi-Stage Proportionate Random Sampling (MSPRS) method used to collect the data.

In the first stage researcher collected the school details from the district educational office, followed by one-third of the schools located in the district in different directions (east, west, north and south) in geographical locations.

In second stage from the total number of schools in the district, 2 governmental, 2 aided and 6 private schools were identified. One-third of the students in each class were selected, both boys and girls equally and same way, one-third of the students were selected randomly from each section (including boys and girls from each classes in the school in 7th, 8th and 9th students).

It is to note that the well-structured questionnaire has been used to collect the data from the students of the 7th student from 6th class's completed syllabus on environment, likewise from 8th students 7th class's completed syllabus on environment and finally from 9th students 8th class's completed syllabus on environment.

TABLE-1 Distribution Of Respondents Socio-Economic And Demographic Characteristics With Type Of School And Applications On Environment

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARAECTRISTICS	TYPE OF THE SCHOOL								
	GOVERNMENT			GOVERNMENTAIDED			PRIVATE		
	Poor	Fair	High	Poor	Fair	High	Poor	Fair	High
Sex									
Female	9 (30.0)	8 (57.1)	75 (19.7)	4 (13.3)	1 (7.1)	81 (21.3)	17 (56.7)	5 (35.7)	225 (59.1)
Male	4 (6.6)	10 (43.5)	40 (13.3)	6 (9.8)	2 (8.7)	31 (10.3)	51 (83.6)	11 (47.8)	230 (76.4)
Residence									

Rural	10 (22.7)	15 (50.0)	103 (24.2)	8 (18.2)	3 (10.0)	78 (18.4)	26 (59.1)	12 (40.0)	244 (57.4)
Urban	3 (6.4)	3 (42.9)	12 (4.7)	2 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	34 (13.2)	42 (89.4)	4 (57.1)	211 (82.1)
Religion									
Hindus	8 (12.1)	17 (51.5)	100 (17.9)	9 (13.6)	3 (9.1)	102 (18.3)	49 (74.2)	13 (39.4)	356 (63.8)
Christians	3 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (9.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (6.3)	12 (80.0)	3 (100.0)	80 (84.2)
Muslim	2 (20.0)	1 (100.0)	6 (20.7)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (13.8)	7 (70.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (65.5)
Caste									
Unknown	0 (0.0)	3 (42.9)	28 (23.3)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)	29 (24.2)	13 (86.7)	4 (57.1)	63 (52.5)
SCs	4 (28.6)	12 (92.3)	51 (40.2)	3 (21.4)	1 (7.7)	25 (19.7)	7 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	51 (40.2)
STs	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (20.0)	1 (25.0)	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (75.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (80.0)
OBCs	5 (15.2)	2 (33.3)	25 (18.1)	2 (6.1)	0 (0.0)	19 (13.8)	26 (78.8)	4 (66.7)	94 (68.1)
FC	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	4 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (71.4)
Others	4 (19.0)	1 (10.0)	8 (2.9)	2 (9.5)	1 (10.0)	38 (13.6)	15 (71.4)	8 (80.0)	234 (83.6)
Mother's Education									
10th	9 (31.0)	13 (54.2)	85 (33.1)	6 (20.7)	2 (8.3)	56 (21.8)	14 (48.3)	9 (37.5)	116 (45.1)
12th	4 (10.0)	4 (57.1)	17 (9.6)	1 (2.5)	1 (14.3)	29 (16.3)	35 (87.5)	2 (28.6)	132 (74.2)
UG	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	12 (8.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	24 (16.9)	10 (100.0)	2 (66.7)	106 (74.6)
PG	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.2)	2 (22.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.4)	7 (77.8)	2 (100.0)	82 (96.5)
Phd	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	2 (66.7)	1 (100.0)	19 (95.0)
Father's education									
10th	11 (22.4)	15 (68.2)	84 (26.9)	4 (8.2)	1 (4.5)	62 (19.9)	34 (69.4)	6 (27.3)	166 (53.2)
12th	2 (8.7)	2 (28.6)	23 (13.1)	3 (13.0)	1 (14.3)	28 (15.9)	18 (78.3)	4 (57.1)	125 (71.0)
UG	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	7 (6.0)	2 (18.2)	0 (0.0)	14 (12.0)	9 (81.8)	2 (66.7)	96 (82.1)
PG	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	8 (12.1)	7 (100.0)	2 (66.7)	57 (86.4)
Phd	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	11 (100.0)

Mother's Status									
Unemployed	8 (21.1)	4 (28.6)	41 (13.0)	5 (13.2)	3 (21.4)	50 (15.8)	25 (65.8)	7 (50.0)	225 (71.2)
Employed	5 (9.4)	14 (60.9)	74 (20.2)	5 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	62 (16.9)	43 (81.1)	9 (39.1)	230 (62.8)
Father's Status									
Unemployed	1 (16.7)	1 (100.0)	2 (6.9)	1 (16.7)	0 (0.0)	13 (44.8)	4 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	14 (48.3)
Employed	12 (14.1)	17 (47.2)	113 (17.3)	9 (10.6)	3 (8.3)	99 (15.2)	64 (75.3)	16 (44.4)	441 (67.5)
Age									
10	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (100.0)
11	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.8)	1 (9.1)	0 (0.0)	6 (8.5)	10 (90.9)	2 (100.0)	63 (88.7)
12	5 (15.6)	7 (50.0)	46 (22.5)	5 (15.6)	2 (14.3)	26 (12.7)	22 (68.8)	5 (35.7)	132 (64.7)
13	5 (20.0)	5 (50.0)	38 (15.3)	2 (8.0)	1 (10.0)	46 (18.5)	18 (72.0)	4 (40.0)	165 (66.3)
14	1 (5.9)	6 (54.5)	25 (17.2)	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	34 (23.4)	14 (82.4)	5 (45.5)	86 (59.3)
15	2 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	4 (44.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (55.6)
Student Class									
7	6 (13.3)	7 (43.8)	49 (22.7)	3 (6.7)	2 (12.5)	20 (9.3)	36 (80.0)	7 (43.8)	147 (68.1)
8	5 (23.8)	6 (60.0)	38 (15.0)	3 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	40 (15.8)	13 (61.9)	4 (40.0)	175 (69.2)
9	2 (8.0)	5 (45.5)	28 (13.1)	4 (16.0)	1 (9.1)	52 (24.4)	19 (76.0)	5 (45.5)	133 (62.4)

Source: Primary Data The figures in the parenthesis are percentages

Environmental application varied strongly with age. Among 10-year-olds in private schools 100% were in the "high application" category the younger government-school respondents showed no notable application. By 12 and 13 years a majority shifted to higher levels of application particularly in private schools (64.7% and 66.3% high). At age 14, 59.3% still reflected high application though government and aided schools had more "fair" responses. Interestingly 15-year-olds showed weaker engagement overall with 55.6% reporting high in private schools but very low among others. Suggesting that middle adolescents (12–14 years) had the most consistent and widespread environmental practices. Class 7 students showed a mix with 68.1% in private schools at "high" application, while government-aided peers only 9.3% high. In Class 8, private schools again led 69.2% high but government and aided schools showed more uneven distribution. Class 8 students presented the next high application overall, with 62.4% in private schools and 24.4% in aided schools reporting consistent practice. Indicating that as students progress in grade level their environmental actions become more frequent, with private schools giving a sharper push. Females leaned more toward "fair" and "high" application compared to males. Among females, 59.1% in private schools reported high environmental application, males stood higher at 76.4% in the same category. Interestingly, government-aided schools saw more "fair" responses among

females 21.3% than males 10.3%. Showing that boys were slightly more engaged in consistent practices, though girls showed steady moderate to high commitment particularly in government and aided schools. Urban students had a sharper shift toward high engagement with 82.1% in private schools reporting high application compared to 57.4% in rural private schools. Rural respondents showed more dispersion with about 18–24% in "fair" application" categories across school types. Urban living clearly gave children greater exposure and opportunities to practice environmentally responsible behaviors.

Across religions Hindu respondents was higher in the distribution with 63.8% in private schools showing high application. Christian students displayed the highest percentage of high application (84.2%) especially in private schools, whereas Muslims showed 65.5% high. Religious background could have influenced intensity but not overall direction children across groups leaned positive.

Others and STs groups showed the strongest environmental application with 83.6% and 80% reporting high levels respectively. STs in private had highest share of low application 75%. SC students had more mixed responses with only 40.2% high and a notable share in the "poor" and "fair" categories. Forward Caste (FC) students leaned positively with 71.4% high. Caste differences indicate that OBC, FC, ST and "Others" categories show higher consistency while SC students require more support to strengthen environmental practices. Application was strongly associated with parental education. Students whose mothers had PG or PhD qualifications overwhelmingly had high levels of environmental practice (96.5% and 95% respectively). Similarly fathers with PG or PhD education also reflected very high outcomes (86.4% and 100%). By contrast, children of parents with only 10th-level schooling showed weaker consistency (45–53% high). A clear intergenerational transmission effect higher parental education strongly increases children's environmental application. 71.2% of children of unemployed mothers reported high application in government schools 62.8% of employed mothers' children showed high application in private schools. Father's employment showed a similar effect 67.5% of children of employed fathers in private schools reported high application versus lower consistency among unemployed fathers' children. Economic stability somehow aligns with stronger environmental practice among students.

TABLE-2 Distribution Of Respondents By Education Supporting Systems With Type Of School And Application On Environment

EDUCATION SUPPORTING SYSTEMS	TYPE OF THE SCHOOL								
	GOVERNMENT			GOVERNMENT-AIDED			GOVERNMENT		
Going to tuition	**Poor**	**Fair**	**High**	**Poor**	**Fair**	**High**	**Poor**	**Fair**	**High**
No	8 (16.0)	15 (51.7)	83 (17.0)	10 (20.0)	2 (6.9)	93 (19.1)	32 (64.0)	12 (41.4)	312 (63.9)
Yes	5 (12.2)	3 (37.5)	32 (16.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	19 (9.8)	36 (87.8)	4 (50.0)	143 (73.7)
Exposed to Exhibition									
No	6 (9.2)	11 (50.0)	52 (14.6)	9 (13.8)	1 (4.5)	49 (13.7)	50 (76.9)	10 (45.5)	256 (71.7)
Yes	7 (26.9)	7 (46.7)	63 (19.4)	1 (3.8)	2 (13.3)	63 (19.4)	18 (69.2)	6 (40.0)	199 (61.2)
Visited Exhibition									
No	13 (20.0)	11 (57.9)	76 (18.8)	7 (10.8)	1 (5.3)	73 (18.1)	45 (69.2)	7 (36.8)	255 (63.1)

Yes	0 (0.0)	7 (38.9)	39 (14.0)	3 (11.5)	2 (11.1)	39 (14.0)	23 (88.5)	9 (50.0)	200 (71.9)
Participated in Exhibition									
No	8 (15.7)	12 (46.2)	84 (19.3)	7 (13.7)	2 (7.7)	65 (14.9)	36 (70.6)	12 (46.2)	287 (65.8)
Yes	5 (12.5)	6 (54.5)	31 (12.6)	3 (7.5)	1 (9.1)	47 (19.1)	32 (80.0)	4 (36.4)	168 (68.3)
Motivation									
No	9 (12.2)	10 (43.5)	86 (19.1)	9 (12.2)	2 (8.7)	90 (20.0)	56 (75.7)	11 (47.8)	274 (60.9)
Yes	4 (23.5)	8 (57.1)	29 (12.5)	1 (5.9)	1 (7.1)	22 (9.5)	12 (70.6)	5 (35.7)	181 (78.0)

Source: Primary Data The figures in the parenthesis are percentages

Students who attended tuition had stronger commitment overall. Among them, 73.7% in private schools reported high application, compared to 63.9% of non-tuition private students. The story is opposite in both government-aided schools, those who went to tuition had 9.8% high than non-tuition peers 19.1% high and government students went to tuition 16.5% high and non-tuition 17% high. Tuition exposure has some better structure and reinforced ecopractices.

Exposure to exhibitions made a difference. Among those who had no exposure, 71.7% in private schools still showed high application, but with exposure, the number was slightly lower 61.2% high. Interestingly, government-aided students with exhibition exposure 19.4% high outperformed those without 13.1% high. Same with government school students with exposure vs no was 19.4% high vs 13.6% high. Exhibitions created some awareness and translates into stronger applications especially for government and government-aided children.

Actually visiting exhibitions proved more valuable than mere exposure. In private schools 71.9% of visitors reported high application compared to 63.1% of non-visitors. In government-aided schools and government schools the non-visitors had high application, it could underline that government school children do not get much opportunities yet they tend to apply what they learn at school.

Participation clearly had engagement in application. In government-aided schools, 19.1% of participants reported high application, compared to 14.9% of non-participants. In private schools, participants 68.3% high and non-participants 65.8% high were closer, but the act of direct involvement seemed to consistently lift commitment. Motivation was a decisive factor. Among motivated students, 78% in private schools had high application compared to only 60.9% among non-motivated peers. In government-aided schools too, motivated students 9.5% high way lesser than the non-motivated peers 20% high. In government schools there is a same pattern 12.5% high lesser than the non-motivated peers 19.1% high. Proving that internal motivation strongly drives application sometimes even more than external supports like exhibitions or tuition.

CONCLUSION

Our study strongly points out that environmental education is not only theoretical but also reflected in children's lived practices and choices. Application of eco-practices was different across socio-economic and demographic backgrounds with middle adolescents having the most consistent behaviors. Private school students were more engaged but government and aided school children showed uneven but good progress. Parental education and employment strongly enhanced children's practices, showing the influence of family background. Middle adolescents (11–14) had the greatest enthusiasm for eco-friendly habits indicating this is a critical age window for strengthening sustainable values. Class 9 students had better evolving critical awareness reflecting that age and maturity grow and deepen environmental care and concern. Parental education and employment strongly enhanced children's practices, showing the

influence of family background. Caste and urban–rural location shaped opportunities and outcomes with disadvantaged groups requiring more support. Education-supporting systems further determined application tuition, exhibitions, participation and especially motivation made a visible difference, although their impact varied by school type. Altogether, the results emphasize undeniably that environmental practices evolve through a combination of individual, family and institutional influences reminding us that environmental learning is both a school and a social responsibility. Closing the gaps across school types and backgrounds still is and will be most essential to make sure all children translate environmental learning into sustainable living. Academic programs must therefore integrate practical activities with careerlinked opportunities to sustain motivation. Strengthening early and late adolescence with targeted interventions can make sure that enthusiasm is not lost with age, securing a generation more consistent in its environmental responsibility.

Recommendations

We live in a busy world with growing urban space, lifestyle and raising health and environmental issues. It is everyone's responsibility to be aware and take necessary steps towards living a sustainable life and protecting the planet at all costs. Particularly from a younger age, children at every stage need age-appropriate ways to practice environmental care playful and simple activities for the youngest, deeper responsibility and leadership chances for adolescents, and career-linked awareness for older teens. Schools and families together can keep the spark alive so sustainable habits grow with age instead of fading. Extra attention must be given to students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and every schools irrespective of whether it is government, government-aided or private should create more structured opportunities like exhibitions, tuition and motivational programs so every child, regardless of background, can practice and sustain eco-friendly habits.

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