

Role of Social Institutions in Creating the Environmental Awareness

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Abstract

Environment is neglected today all over the world because of the environmental pollution which causes many crises and dangers. There are many reasons that cause environmental pollution and make instability. One of those reasons is the lack of environmental planning representing by the negative role of some of the community individuals who practice bad things towards the environment because of their lack of culture and environmental awareness. So individuals behavior towards the environment cannot improve unless their awareness is raised. Many communities suffer from environmental trouble that may threat the social and economic reality. So such issue needs a study and guidance for individuals roles towards their environment. The individual doesn't practice a behavior without having previous backgrounds or specific pictures in his mind that he remembers from his socialization which are formed because of many variables. Such individual's memories reflect the individual's dealing with the environment. So we can see variety in individuals' behavior towards the natural phenomena due to the different cultural and social variables.

Key words: social institutions, environmental awareness, environmental culture

دور المؤسسات الاجتماعية في خلق الوعي البيئي

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الخلاصة:

تحتضر البيئة اليوم على نطاق عالمي بسبب ما تعانيه من كوارث واطار وتلوث وأسباب أخرى مجتمعة اخلت بمقومات التوازن الطبيعي وسوء التخطيط البيئي وعلى رأس العوامل المسببة هو الدور السلبي الذي يقوم به بعض افراد المجتمع من خلال ممارساتهم الجائرة اتجاه البيئة وهذا نتيجة قصور واضح في الثقافة والوعي البيئي، لذلك فإن تعديل سلوك الافراد وتمثلاتهم اتجاه واقعهم البيئي لا يبدأ إلا من وعي صائب ومعرفة تنعكس على السلوك الممارس اتجاه البيئة، وتعاني الكثير من المجتمعات من أزمة بيئية قد تهدد الواقع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي السائد لذلك يتطلب الامر دراسة وتوجيه لأدوار الافراد باتجاه بيئتهم، فالفرد لا يمارس السلوك بدون خلفيات مسبقة او صور معينة مخزنة في ذهنه قد كونها بفضل متغيرات كثيرة وعن طريق التنشئة الاجتماعية وهذه التصورات الذهنية تشكل تمثل الفرد للواقع البيئي لذلك نرى تباين سلوكيات الافراد اتجاه الظواهر البيئية باختلاف المتغيرات الاجتماعية والثقافية.

الكلمات الدالة: المؤسسة الاجتماعية، الوعي البيئي، الثقافة البيئية

Introduction:

An individual is considered as a part of a social system which is represented by the social institutions that are responsible for raising awareness. Such institutions are different from one society to another according to the social and cultural nature of the society. That's why such institutions are relative. The environment is considered as an important issue for each society but dealing with the environmental trouble is differentiated due to the society nature and culture. Regardless of the differences in technological means to deal with the environmental troubles, but the social and cultural side plays a great role in dealing with such trouble and guiding the environmental awareness. So it is the task of the social institutions to raise awareness of people towards environment to have environmental culture to face the current environmental trouble. Such social institutions have to educate people how to deal with the environment correctly. Dealing with the environment depends on the different socializations. Some social institutions like the household, school, religious institutions, media and social norms and traditions are also responsible for raising awareness of people on keeping the environment clean to protect the society from the environmental pollution and face the different environmental troubles.

First : search problem and importance

The environment issue is very important in the developed countries and societies. So governmental offices should pay attention to this issue directly or indirectly. The governmental bodies have to highlight the relationship between culture and awareness and the environment. So environment issue is a social issue that needs not only laws and regulations but also giving individuals and groups the chance to take part in all responsibilities to solve the environmental problems. This can be done through raising awareness of people to respect and deal with environment correctly. The incorrect dealing way with environment is caused by the lack of education and awareness. Individuals ignorance about the relation between them and their environment is another reason behind their bad dealing with the environment. So raising awareness of people towards such important issue is so necessary to be done by the social institutions.

Search importance: this search is important because it insists on raising awareness which is one of the most important factors to protect the environment. The environmental problem is a social issue that needs cooperation by all not only the governmental offices or specific bodies. A field study has been done in this search about the role of the social institutions in raising awareness of people towards the environment.

Second : concepts and scientific expressions

- 1- The social institution means a group of people residing in the same locality and under the same government or a group or class having common interests to maintain a human and social value. Sociologists use the social institution term to describe the standards that identify the social behavior in all different fields of life. These institutions are representing by the household, school, religion, and media.[1]
- 2- The environmental awareness can be define as an individual's understanding and consciousness toward the biophysical environment and its problems, including human interactions and effects and his role in solving the environmental problem.[2 p22]

Third: the social institutions and their role in creating the environmental awareness.

1- Socialization:

It means the act of adapting behavior to the norms of a culture or society. It is based on the social interaction. It aims to make an individual acquire a suitable behavior, standards and tends for the social roles and enable him to deal with different situations of his everyday life. It is an operation that assures the interaction between man and the natural environment during different institutions [3 p6] including:

a- household

Household is considered as the first and most important institution of socialization and the cornerstone in building the society. An individual can start his social representation from his household. The household has a great role in directing an individual behavior towards the environment. The household has to be fully educated about environment protection to affect the individuals to have better understanding on such important issue and encourage him to affect others through raising awareness about how to maintain the environment. So the household has an important role in identifying the individual's behavior and provide him with good impression that can be used during his everyday life. Each individual can be changed through transferring from a stage to another or from a role to another in his life but the first memories including acquired norms and traditions will stay in his mind and thinking to be used in facing any situation. Thus, household is responsible for preparing an individual in facing his environmental reality through educating him about how to keep the environment clean and any other positive behavior towards the environmental reality.[4 p670]

b- School

The school is very important institution because it deals directly with the social reality. It has a great effect on building an individual's personality through directing him to behave correctly. It also educates individuals on how to make the good behavior in accordance with the social norms, traditions, beliefs and the regulations that are acceptable by the society through cooperation with the household. So education is so important in raising the cultural level of an individual to contribute in building the society. The school is a part of the general environment, where individuals can acquire experiences about caring in environment and to carry their responsibilities towards environment and contribute in solving the environmental problems. They can participate in cleaning campaigns, afforestation or weed control.[5 p11]

A teacher is considered as an ideal to be imitated by his students in drawing a nice picture towards environment protection. He effects them directly through educating them correctly and direct their environmental tendsthat lead to live healthy in a clean environment. He also educates them how to care about the school furniture and make the school clean and prevent them from throwing garbage in the incorrect place. So such good habits and raising awareness of students can contribute in increasing the environmental awareness.[4 p671]

So the school has an important role in directing the individuals behavior towards environment through making campaigns to raise awareness about making the school clean and protecting the environment. It is a great role in building generations that respect and protect the environment. It is necessary to make

textbooks about environment and environmental awareness to be taught at school because it is important to have such culture to avoid crises that threatens our environmental, economic and social reality. So both the household and the school are responsible for educating people about the environmental education.

c- **Media (print and press)**

It is necessary to refer that there is a new competence in media called environmental information which started after the conference held in Stockholm in (1972). Environmental information expression consists of two words (information) and (environment) which is a kind of media that takes care in raising awareness about maintaining the environment. This kind of media urge individuals, groups and governmental institutions to maintain environment to make the balance between the environment and development to achieve the sustainable development to fulfill the society needs.[6]

Media has an important role in assuring the real communication between the individual and environment and raising the environmental awareness through mass or print media (like newspapers, magazines, books, posters) or press (like TV, cinema, internet). Media can use social communication means including (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other websites) to propagate the environmental awareness because such means are used every day by a large number of people. This can contribute in creating a generation that has a good impression about caring in environment and change the bad habits or negative memories about environment. Raising environmental awareness can contribute in creating correct environment to live in healthy place and avoid the negative behaviors that threat the environment and the social and environmental security[7 p22]

2- **Religion**

Religions include many letters to human beings among those letters is maintaining nature which is considered as a gift from God that should be maintained. Islamic religion, for an instance, pay specific attention to the subject of maintain nature including clean environment because it is the place where man lives, gets his needs, worships his God and works to fulfill life's requirements. Clean environment has a direct connection with purity in Islam[3 p5]

Islam advises people to clean and maintain the environment to live happily. The modern world faces the danger of environment pollution and intended damage of the natural sources, thus laws and international treaties are legislated to prevent the environment damage. Some countries violate such laws because they are against their interests as USA did in (Kyoto treaty) that leads to increase the pollution dangers including nuclear radiation and it's damaged effects and forests wildfire and changing the green lands into clinkers. Violating laws and international treaties is the reason behind Ozone layer pollution. So maintain environment needs big sacrifices by individuals and communities especially by the developed countries. As a result, it is necessary to adapt the moral and religious standards because they have a great influence on people in some communities. Religious advises is sometimes more applicable than laws in some countries. Thus religion and clergy men has very important role in educating people about maintaining the environment through providing lectures and advices to introduce Islamic vision to treat the incorrect images and impression about environment[8 p19]

3- Culture or education

The everyday discussions in our country deal with the political, economic and social to pics...etc, without talking about any environmental problems. So the question is, are the environmental problems less important than above mentioned topics? Or the environmental problems have no big impact, or it is a matter of lacking awareness.

The education and awareness are connected with man's development, his social nature and his scientific level. Awareness can develop as man's social practice developed and interaction with the subject increased. [9] So the awareness of environmental topics is called the environmental awareness which is a part of general culture. The environmental culture means the individual acquirement for knowledgeable, emotional and behavioral components through his continuing deal with his environment which contributes in forming his social attitudes towards the environment. [10]

There is an alternate connection between the culture and the environment. So any adapting project of environment protection cannot be done unless it is connected with social, cultural and economic issues, and then connected with the general policies for any State. The natural balance of the various environmental systems is the result of the connection and interaction of that system's components while culture is the result of the connection and interaction of all its elements. Adapting the environment issues and their social impact is connected with culture and educated people who interested in the environment issue in addition to their other interests. [11 p11]

Environmental education is part of general education and educated people and authors can propagate the importance of the environmental awareness through their books and essays. Educated people can also foster the positive social impression about environment and develop the responsibility feeling of individuals through understanding the environment and its problems.

4- Social norms and traditions:

The individual can be developed in a social frame through the interaction with his group and affected and be affected by them. The group can identify the individual behavior which is the result of habits, regulations, norms and traditions that are acquired from socialization. **Social norm** can be defined as a pattern of behavior in a particular group, community, or culture, accepted as normal and to which an individual is accepted to conform. Such norms are formed on the base of experiences and can be developed to become respected traditions. A **tradition** is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. So traditions are specific ways connected with a group in specific moral values and there are punishments for those who violate such values and they are connected with the harmony of the group's values as well as the social place of individuals and their behavior. [12 p32]

So such habits which are formed by daily behaviors practice towards the environment, are often negative habits like throw garbage in incorrect place or cut trees. On the contrary, there are inherited traditions focus on how to deal with weather and understanding the seasons sequence which are ready impressions contributed in forming our representations about environment. Ancestors were dealing easily with the environment through providing specific expressions for each season, which is clear from the popular proverbs inherited by the generations. A popular proverb says, as an example,(that in August, grapes are decreased, palm dates increased and winter will start after few months) which express the ancestors knowledge about weather and environment. Another popular proverb says that (August is too hot during the day, as

if the temperature melt the nail in a door, and nice during the night), so day is contradicting from night in August.[13 p15]

We have to refer that such popular proverbs can no longer describe our weather because of the environmental problems and the weather difference including greenhouse effect which makes summer season longer and hotter. Such popular proverbs show that ancestors were interested in weather and understood the natural phenomena because they had direct connection with nature, but we can see bad social habits and behaviors practiced against environment nowadays.

Third: search results which show the role of the social institutions in creating the environmental awareness.

The searcher makes a survey on some people as a sample from five neighborhoods that are (Kalage neighborhood, Al Mahdiya, 17th of July, Adel and Bakerly). These neighborhoods are different in the social, economic and health situations but closed regarding the environmental situation which is found in general in Hilla city of Babylon province. The searcher provides the sample individuals with specific forms to measure their environmental awareness and the role of the social institutions in such topic. The survey, descriptive and social, started on June 21st, 2018 and lasted for two months, measurement was used as a tool in data collection. The results focus on the role of the social institutions in developing the environmental awareness in Hilla community. The survey results are as follow:

1- Household:

Household is considered as the first and most important institution of socialization and the cornerstone in building the society. It can educate individuals how to direct their behavior including the environmental awareness. The survey shows that the highest percentage is (agree) which is (%86.2) or (370 person of both sexes) which comes in the first rank, (not sure) comes second which is (%7.9) or (34 person), (not agree) comes third which is (%5.8) or (25 person). So most individuals agree that the household is responsible for educating their members about the environmental awareness and all other behavioral issues. This shows the role of social variables and their connection with individual behavior towards environment.

Table (1) shows that the household is responsible for individual behavior towards environment.

Percentage	Repetitions	Answer's kind
%86.2	370	Agree
%5.8	25	Not agree
%7.9	34	Not sure
%100	429	total

2- School :

School contributes in what an individual acquire of information and skills in different subjects including environmental, social, psychological and human that assist in developing the mental and performed capacities. It has a great role in educating students in many issues including self-dependence, ambition, knowledge, skill, student achievement and good values. The survey shows that the highest percentage is (agree) which is (%55.0) or (236 person of both sexes) which comes in the first rank, (not sure) comes second which is (%24.7) or (106 person), (not agree) comes third which is (%20.3) or (87 person). So the highest percentage supports the role of student achievement in evaluating individual's behavior towards environment through textbooks including guidance and instructions that clarify the role of an

individual in maintaining environment. The educational side is considered as one of the social and educational variables in individuals' representation for environment as assured by the field study results.

Table (2) shows the school contribution in evaluating the social behavior of individuals towards the environment.

Percentage	Repetitions	Answer's kind
%55.0	236	Agree
%20.3	87	Not agree
%24.7	106	Not sure
%100	429	total

3- Media

Media is considered as a fourth governmental authority in the current time because it has a great effect on discovering dangers that threat the environmental situation of the society through propagating facts and correct information about environmental issues. It also contributes in educating people about the different environmental changes. The survey shows that the highest percentage is (agree) which is (%59.2) or (254 person of both sexes) which comes in the first rank, (not sure) comes second which is (%21.9) or (94 person), (not agree) comes third which is (%18.9) or (81 person). So the highest percentage supports the participation of media in explaining the environmental problems to the individuals. Media is one of the social institution which contributes in drawing the individuals' social representation for the environmental status as assured by the field study results.

Table (3) shows media contribution in drawing the real impression for environmental problem in the society

Percentage	Repetitions	Answer's kind
%59.2	254	Agree
%18.9	81	Not agree
%21.9	94	Not sure
%100	429	total

4- Religious institution:

The religious institution has a great role in developing individual's awareness about the environmental problems in the society through the religious statements delivered by a clergymen. The human being is responsible for following the religious advices regarding maintaining and protecting environment. The survey shows that the highest percentage is (agree) which is (%70.9) or (304 person of both sexes) which comes in the first rank, (not sure) comes second which is (%17.2) or (74 person), (not agree) comes third which is (%11.9) or (51 person). So the highest percentage supports the role of the religious institution in directing the social behaviors towards environment while the lowest percentage of the sample doesn't agree about the role of the religious institution in such topic.

Table (4) shows the contribution of the religious institution in directing the social behaviors towards environment and how to maintain it.

Percentage	Repetitions	Answer's kind
%70.9	304	Agree
%11.9	51	Not agree
%17.2	74	Not sure
%100	429	total

5- Popular proverbs:

Popular proverbs are considered very important in the social life for many communities because they reflect the daily activities. A proverb is formed due to past experience including weather and environment. It is used to face the social life and its variables and reveals the hidden sides of that life. Studying proverbs reveal the experiences found in the social mind. The survey shows that the highest percentage is (agree) which is (%52.7) or (226 person of both sexes) which comes in the first rank, (not sure) comes second which is (%26.3) or (113 person), (not agree) comes third which is (%21.0) or (90 person). So the highest percentage supports the role of popular proverbs in understanding the seasonal weather and environmental changes. The popular proverbs, as social norms and traditions, are considered as a social variable that effects the individual's representation towards environment.

Table (5) shows that the popular proverbs are considered as a source of our understanding for the year seasons and how to deal with them.

Percentage	repetitions	Answer's kind
%52.7	226	Agree
%21.0	90	Not agree
%26.3	113	Not sure
%100	429	Total

Conclusion :

Although the environmental pollution is spread because of man's activities or weather changes, still there is a hope to avoid the environmental troubles through increasing awareness. The survey proves that people have a great trust in the social institutions role in developing a generation with an environmental education. Thus the social institutions have a great role in raising awareness regarding environment and its troubling and how to face and solve the environmental problems.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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