

The Development of Children's Environmental Identity Through a Descriptive Phenomenological Perspective

Veri Ikra Mulyadi

STAI Miftahul Ulum Tarate Pandian Sumenep

Email: veriikra.m021@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Veri Ikra Mulyadi

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Abstract

Modernization and urbanization have brought significant changes to children's living environments, often impacting the development of their environmental identity. The loss of green spaces, urban sprawl, and cultural shifts have reduced children's emotional connection to their residential environments. This study employs a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore children's subjective experiences in interpreting their environment amidst modernization challenges. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and narrative analysis to uncover the essence of children's experiences with physical and social environments. The findings reveal that children's environmental identity is influenced by physical factors, such as green spaces and play facilities, as well as social factors, such as family and community support. Additionally, children's interaction with digital spaces shapes their perception of the real environment. This research offers recommendations for educators, urban planners, and policymakers to create environments that holistically support the development of children's environmental identity, especially in the context of rapid urbanization.

Keywords: *Environmental identity, Children, Descriptive phenomenology, Urbanization, modernization, Emotional connection, Digital spaces.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of modernization and urbanization, children's environmental identities are often fragmented due to rapid changes in living spaces, such as urban sprawl, loss of green space, or cultural shifts.¹ A deep understanding of children's experiences of their environment is important to ensure they can thrive in an atmosphere that supports the formation of a healthy identity.²

In these situations, children often lose emotional connection with their environment due to the dynamics of change that are not always aligned with their developmental needs. For example, the loss of safe and open play spaces, the replacement of community areas with shopping malls, or the pressure of modern culture that reduces direct social interaction, all contribute to a child's sense of reduced attachment to the environment. This phenomenon can affect a child's *sense of belonging* and ability to understand their identity in a broader context.³

In addition, modernization also brings challenges in the form of technology that often replaces the exploration of the physical environment with virtual activities. Dependence on digital devices can reduce children's time to interact directly with their surroundings, hindering the development of important social, emotional, and cognitive skills. In the long run, this has the potential to create a generation that is less sensitive to environmental issues, less socially responsible, and less sensitive to local values.

However, on the other hand, modernization and urbanization also present opportunities. A well-designed urban environment can provide educational, cultural, and social facilities that support children's development. For example, the existence of city parks, interactive educational facilities, or community-based programs can be a means to build a positive environmental identity. Therefore, it is important to understand how children interpret their environment in these different contexts, in order to create development strategies that are responsive to their needs.⁴

¹ Maharani, W. S. (2022). *Self-Concept of Broken Home Children (Descriptive Study on the Self-Concept of Broken Home Children in the Development of Mental Health in Cimahi City)* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Computer Indonesia).

² Stevanus, K., & Setiarini, M. (2022). Emotional Development of Orphaned Adolescents. *MAGENANG: Journal of Christian Theology and Education*, 3(1), 44-53.

³ Budirahayu, R. Y., & Nisa Rachmah, N. A. (2019). *The Ideal Role of Fathers in Adolescent Self-Identity in Cultural Perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta).

⁴ Christiani, L. C., & Ikasari, P. N. (2020). Generation Z and the maintenance of intergenerational relationships in the perspective of Javanese culture. *Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 4(2), 84-105.

The descriptive phenomenological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of children's subjective experiences, thus providing insight into the dynamics of the formation of their environmental identity.⁵ By understanding children's perceptions, emotions, and relationships to their living spaces, we can develop effective measures to create an environment that supports their psychological, social, and emotional well-being amid the challenges of modernization.⁶

In this context, a child's environmental identity not only reflects their emotional and physical connection to the living space, but also influences the way they understand themselves in their interactions with others and the world around them. The formation of a healthy environmental identity is the foundation for psychosocial development, adaptability, and a sense of responsibility for environmental sustainability.

However, the rapid transition in the environment due to modernization often creates challenges that affect children's connection to where they live. Children may feel alienated from their own environment, lose space they can identify as theirs, or have trouble building deep social connections. For example, moving to a dense urban area or a culturally homogeneous environment can reduce a child's chances of experiencing a diversity of spaces rich in meaning.

Furthermore, the concept of environmental identity in the era of globalization is no longer only based on physical space, but also includes digital space which is now an integral part of children's lives. Social media and digital technologies give children different environmental experiences, but often with the consequence of decreased direct connection to the physical environment. This can affect their sense of attachment to the real environment as well as the development of local cultural values that are important to their identity.⁷

Therefore, a descriptive phenomenological approach becomes relevant to understand how children interpret their environment in the midst of these challenges. This approach not only provides deep insights into their subjective experiences, but also

⁵ Jauhar, J. (2018). Motorcycle Gangs in Indonesia: Phenomenological Perspectives. *Madani Journal of Politics and Social Society*, 10(3), 57-72.

⁶ Billah, A. (2016). Character Education for Early Childhood in Islamic Perspective and Its Implementation in Science Materials. *ATTARBIYAH: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education*, 1(2), 243-272.

⁷ Hidayat, D. (2014). Social and cultural identity approach to face negotiation theory and public relations multiculturalism in Germany-China and Indonesia. *Aspikom Journal*, 2(2), 115-126.

uncovers the values, emotions, and meanings that are internalized in their interactions with the physical and social environment.

With this understanding, it is hoped that a responsive strategy can be formulated to support the development of children's environmental identity. This step is important to ensure children have a living space that not only provides physical needs, but also supports their emotional, social, and cognitive development holistically.

RESEARCH METHODS

This method is used to explore the subjective experience of children in depth. Descriptive phenomenology aims to uncover the "essence" of children's experiences of the environment, including how they interpret their residence, school, playroom, or social relationships around them. Data collection techniques include:⁸

1. In-Depth Interview: Children are asked to share their experiences related to the daily environment.
2. Participatory Observation: Understanding children's interactions with physical and social elements in their environment.
3. Narrative Analysis: Interpreting children's stories to find key themes related to environmental identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main factors in the physical and social environment that affect the formation of a child's identity.

1. Physical Environment

The physical environment includes all material and geographical aspects that can affect a child's development. Some of the key factors in this category are:⁹

- a. **Housing Conditions:** Where a child lives, be it in an urban or rural area, has a significant impact on their identity. Children who grow up in urban environments may be more exposed to cultural diversity and educational opportunities, while children in rural areas may have stronger connections with local communities and traditions.
- b. **Access to Resources:** Access to educational, health, and recreational facilities is also essential. Children who have access to high-quality schools and health

⁸ Nugrahani, F. (2014). Qualitative research methods in language education research.

⁹ Saragih, N. N. (2023). The Influence of Parents and the Environment on Child Development. *WriteBox*, 1(1).

services tend to have a more positive development of identity compared to those who do not have such access.

- c. **Environmental Safety:** A sense of security in the living environment greatly affects the psychological development of children. A safe environment allows children to explore the world around them without fear, supporting the formation of confidence and identity.

2. Social Environment

The social environment includes interactions with other people as well as social norms that exist in society. Factors in this category include:

- a. **Family:** The family is the first unit in which the child learns about social values, norms, and behaviors. Parenting, communication within the family, and emotional support from family members greatly influence how children shape their identity.
- b. **Peers:** Interaction with peers becomes increasingly important as children age. Peers can influence a child's lifestyle choices, interests, and way of thinking. Positive relationships with peers can increase confidence and help children find their identity.
- c. **Culture and Tradition:** The culture in which children are raised provides context for their identity. Cultural values such as religion, language, and tradition play an important role in shaping children's perspective on the world as well as how they see themselves.
- d. **Social Media:** In today's digital era, social media also plays a big role in shaping children's identities. Exposure to different views and lifestyles through social media platforms can affect how children understand themselves as well as how they want to be seen by others.

3. Interaction between Physical and Social Environment

It is important to note that physical and social factors do not stand alone; they interact with each other to form a child's identity. For example:

- a. A child who grows up in an urban environment (physical environment) may be exposed to different cultures (social environments), thus expanding his or her perspective on identity.

- b. In contrast, a child from a particular cultural background (social environment) may feel pressure to conform to the norms of society at large (the physical environment), which can affect the way he sees himself.

Thus, understanding how these two types of environments interact is essential for understanding the formation of identities in childhood.

Challenges that children face in integrating environmental elements into their identity.

This research identifies the various challenges that children face in integrating elements of the physical, social, and digital environment into the formation of their identity. Based on data analysis from interviews, observations, and narratives, it was found that these challenges can be grouped into several main categories:¹⁰

1. Challenges in Connectivity with the Physical Environment:

- a. Loss of Green Space and Access to Nature: Rapid urbanization and loss of green space are a major challenge for children to feel connected to nature. Many children who live in urban areas have difficulty accessing parks, green open spaces, or natural areas that they can identify as part of their environment.¹¹
- b. Limited Play Spaces: Limited or inadequate play facilities in some areas make it difficult for children to explore their spaces freely, which impacts their physical and social development. Children who don't have a safe play space have a harder time building an emotional attachment to their environment.
- c. Pollution and Environmental Quality: High air pollution, noise, and traffic congestion factors in some urban areas reduce children's comfort in exploring their environment, hindering the process of forming a healthy and positive identity towards their physical space.

2. Challenges in Social Connectedness:

- a. Social Pattern Shift in Community: In some contexts, especially in large cities, children face difficulties in building deep social relationships with peers or community members due to social pattern shifts, such as individualism or lack of

¹⁰ Manarfa, A., & Lasaiba, D. (2023). Traces of Character over Culture: Tracing Identity in Education. *Lani: Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 67-75.

¹¹ Tasya, A., Marshal, A., Hasya, A., Hasbi, F., & Fridayanti, F. (2024). Dynamics of Arab Ethnic Identity in the Sundanese Ethnic Community. *Journal of Psychology Students*, 3(2), 101-110.

social interaction between neighbors. This makes children feel alienated from their social environment.

- b. **Lack of Social Support from the Family:** Some children experience challenges in building a strong identity due to time constraints or attention from parents who are busy with work. Limited family support reduces children's opportunities to acquire values that can help them develop a connection with their environment.
- c. **Different Social Norms:** Cultural differences or social values that exist within a community or school environment can affect how children interpret their social spaces. Children who are in heterogeneous environments may feel confused in adjusting to existing social norms.

3. Challenges in Digital Environment Integration:

- a. **Alienation from the Physical Environment:** Although digital technology opens up access for children to explore the outside world, overuse can separate them from direct interaction with their physical environment. Higher engagement in cyberspace often reduces their chances of developing a stronger connection to their physical environment.
- b. **The Influence of Social Media on Environmental Perceptions:** Children who are exposed to beauty standards, lifestyles, and norms shaped by social media may feel alienated from the reality of their surroundings. This can lead to dissatisfaction with their physical environment that does not conform to the image depicted in the digital world.

4. Challenges in Understanding and Appreciating the Local Environment:

- a. **Loss of Local Cultural Values:** Globalization and cultural homogenization cause children to often be exposed to cultural values that are global, which may not be in line with the local culture in which they live. This causes them to lack understanding and appreciation of the values inherent in their surroundings, making it difficult to build an identity based on attachment to the local culture.¹²
- b. **Identity Uncertainty in Urban Environments:** Children living in dynamic and multicultural urban environments often face challenges in finding a consistent identity, given the cultural and social diversity that surrounds them. They may feel

¹² Moh Ramin, Nur Intan Permata, and Artamin Hairit, "Optimizing Coffee Production in West Waru: Marketing Strategies and Increasing Immunity through Red Ginger," n.d.

confused or pressured to integrate various different cultural elements into their identity.

5. Challenges in Rapid Environmental Change:¹³

- a. Environmental Uncertainty: The process of rapid changes in the physical environment, such as relocation or major renovations in their area, often leaves children feeling lost or separated from the environment they were previously familiar with. This instability interferes with the development of their identities that are tied to certain spaces and places.
- b. The Impact of the Global Environmental Crisis: Children exposed to global environmental issues such as climate change or natural disasters feel anxious about the future of their environment, which can affect the way they build relationships with their own environment.

These challenges show that children face difficulties in integrating environmental elements into their identities due to a variety of external factors that can limit their access to physical and social environments that support the development of healthy identities. Therefore, it is important to create policies and interventions that can overcome these barriers, provide adequate social support, and pay attention to the balance between the physical and digital worlds in the process of forming children's identities.

The role of parents, educators, and policymakers in creating an environment that supports the development of children's environmental identity.

1. Role of Parents:¹⁴

- a. Providing Behavioral Models: Parents play an important role in shaping a child's environmental identity by being a direct example when it comes to caring for the environment. Parents who teach values such as maintaining cleanliness, respecting nature, and participating in environmental activities can instill a sense of responsibility for the environment in children.
- b. Building an Emotional Connection with the Environment: Parents can invite children to interact with nature, such as visiting the park, gardening, or doing other

¹³ Rohmah, N. N. S., Narimo, S., & Widyasari, C. (2023). Strategy to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students in the global dimension of diversity in elementary schools. *Journal of Elementaria Edukasia*, 6(3), 1254-1269.

¹⁴ Amahoru, A., & Ahyani, E. (2023). Inclusive educational psychology: creating a welcoming learning environment for all students. *Indo-MathEdu Intellectuals Journal*, 4(3), 2368-2377.

outdoor activities. This active involvement helps children feel an emotional closeness to their surroundings.

- c. **Supporting Social Engagement:** Parents also play a role in facilitating children's social relationships with the community through activities that involve neighbors, extended family, or other social groups. This strengthens children's social identity and supports the development of their environmental identity.
- d. **Balanced Use of Technology:** Parents can moderate their children's use of technology and social media, encouraging them to stay connected to their physical environment. Teaching children to use technology as a means of learning that enriches their understanding of the global environment is also important.

2. Role of Educator:¹⁵

- a. **Building a Curriculum that is Integrated with the Environment:** Educators have a crucial role in shaping children's understanding of the importance of the environment through a curriculum that prioritizes the values of sustainability, nature conservation, and social responsibility. Teaching about ecology, local culture, and environmental history can deepen children's awareness of their environmental identity.
- b. **Fostering Social and Collaboration Skills:** Educators can create an inclusive and collaborative learning environment, where children learn to work together in solving environment-related problems, such as greening projects or hygiene campaigns. This helps them develop a sense of community that is important in shaping social and environmental identities.
- c. **Development of Empathy for the Environment:** Educators can also encourage children to feel empathy for environmental issues, such as the climate crisis or pollution, by using project-based approaches or outdoor activities that involve solving environmental problems directly.¹⁶
- d. **Use of Technology for Environmental Education:** Educators can utilize digital technology to improve children's understanding of the environment, such as the use

¹⁵ Nurlita, W. (2024). ANALYSIS OF FACTORS CAUSING MORAL DEGRADATION IN CHILDREN WITH SINGLE PARENT PARENTING PATTERNS. *Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 11(1), 16-30.

¹⁶ Moh Ramin, "IMPLEMENTATION OF WADIAH CONTRACT ON EASY WADIAH SAVINGS PRODUCTS AT BANK SYARIAH INDONESIA (BSI) KCP SAMPANG," n.d.

of apps that teach about nature conservation or educational platforms that connect children to global environmental issues.

3. Role of Policy Maker:¹⁷

- a. Planning and Management of Child-Friendly Environments: Policymakers have the responsibility to design and implement policies that ensure the physical environment supports the development of children's identities. This includes creating safe green spaces, play facilities, and child-friendly urban environments, allowing them to connect with nature and the surrounding community.
- b. Promotion of Environmental Education in the National Curriculum: Policymakers, through education policy, can encourage the integration of environmental education in the national curriculum. It allows children to learn about the importance of sustainability, natural resource management, and their role in maintaining ecological balance.
- c. Support Community Programs and Environmental Initiatives: Policymakers can support initiatives that involve children in community-based activities, such as greening programs, environmental cleanliness, or nature conservation. This provides an opportunity for children to learn first-hand about social responsibility and its connection to their environment.
- d. Regulating Technology for Environmental Balance: Given the growing impact of technology on children, policymakers can establish guidelines or regulations regarding the use of technology in educational and household settings to ensure children stay connected to their physical environment, not just the digital world.

In creating an environment that supports the development of children's environmental identity, synergy between parents, educators, and policymakers is very important. Parents provide direct example and emotional support, educators integrate environmental education in the curriculum and learning experience, while policymakers are responsible for creating a physical and social environment that supports children's growth. With this solid cooperation between these three parties, children can develop a strong and positive environmental identity, which will form a generation that cares about sustainability and social responsibility.

¹⁷ Yulianingsih, W., Suhanadji, S., Nugroho, R., & Mustakim, M. (2020). Parental involvement in assisting children's learning during the covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Obsession: Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 5(2), 1138-1150.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the development of children's environmental identity is greatly influenced by the interaction between physical, social, and digital factors around them. In the context of modernization and urbanization, children face challenges such as the loss of green spaces, urban sprawl, and changing patterns of social interaction that can reduce their emotional connection to the environment in which they live. However, social factors such as family and community support remain important elements in shaping a child's positive environmental identity.

In addition, digital spaces play a dual role, both as an opportunity to broaden children's horizons about the global environment and as a challenge that can reduce their time to interact with the physical environment directly. The results of this study emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in supporting the development of children's environmental identity, which involves the provision of child-friendly physical spaces, strengthening social relationships, and managing the wise use of digital technology.

The implications of this study include recommendations for designing policies, educational programs, and urban planning that take into account the needs of children's development as a whole. By creating a supportive environment, children can build a strong environmental identity, which ultimately contributes to their well-being psychosocially and forms a generation that cares more about environmental sustainability.

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