

ENVIRONMENTAL NEGLECT AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS: A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY USING SOCRATIC-ORIENTED QUESTIONNAIRES

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Abstract

Environmental responsibility in elementary schools is often promoted through rules, reminders, and routines. Yet students may still ignore visible problems, such as litter, misplaced belongings, and untidy classrooms, even when they know cleanliness matters. This study examines environmental neglect as a gap between awareness and responsible action in everyday classroom life. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from 20 elementary students and one teacher at Cendekia Harapan School, Bali, through an online open-ended questionnaire with Socratic-oriented reflective questions about responsibility, consequences, and action. Data were analyzed thematically, with simple percentages used only to describe one closed-response item. The findings show that environmental neglect is shaped by weak personal responsibility, limited awareness of consequences, dependence on teacher reminders, reluctance to act, and peer influence. These themes indicate that environmental neglect is not merely a knowledge problem, but a reflective responsibility gap. The study contributes to environmental character education by showing the need to combine reflective questioning, teacher modeling, classroom routines, and shared responsibility to help students transform environmental awareness into consistent action.

Keywords: *Environmental neglect; Environmental responsibility; Socratic-oriented reflection; Character education; Elementary classroom*

Abstrak

Tanggung jawab lingkungan di sekolah dasar sering dikembangkan melalui aturan, pengingat, dan rutinitas kelas. Namun, siswa masih dapat mengabaikan masalah yang terlihat, seperti sampah, barang yang tidak diletakkan pada tempatnya, dan kelas yang tidak rapi, meskipun mereka memahami pentingnya kebersihan. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengabaian lingkungan sebagai kesenjangan antara kesadaran dan tindakan bertanggung jawab dalam kehidupan kelas sehari-hari. Dengan desain kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan dari 20 siswa sekolah dasar dan satu guru di Cendekia Harapan School, Bali, melalui kuesioner daring terbuka dengan pertanyaan reflektif berorientasi Sokratik tentang tanggung jawab, konsekuensi, dan tindakan. Data dianalisis secara tematik, sedangkan persentase sederhana hanya digunakan untuk menggambarkan satu butir respons tertutup. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengabaian lingkungan dipengaruhi oleh lemahnya tanggung jawab pribadi, terbatasnya kesadaran terhadap konsekuensi, ketergantungan pada pengingat guru, keengganan untuk bertindak, dan pengaruh teman sebaya. Tema-tema ini menunjukkan bahwa pengabaian lingkungan bukan sekadar masalah pengetahuan, melainkan kesenjangan tanggung jawab reflektif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pendidikan karakter lingkungan dengan menegaskan pentingnya penggabungan pertanyaan reflektif, keteladanan guru, rutinitas kelas, dan tanggung jawab bersama untuk mengubah kesadaran lingkungan menjadi tindakan yang konsisten.

Kata Kunci: Pengabaian lingkungan; Refleksi Sokratik; Tanggung jawab; Pendidikan dasar; Kebersihan kelas.

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Introduction

Elementary schools are not only spaces for academic learning but also social environments where children develop responsibility, care, cooperation, self-regulation, and moral awareness. Daily classroom routines, such as disposing of trash properly, preparing learning materials, keeping desks tidy, and caring for shared spaces, are often viewed as simple behavioral expectations. However, these routines are closely related to environmental character education because they require students to recognize that their actions affect themselves, their peers, and the shared learning environment (de Ruig et al., 2023; Lickona, 1992). In this sense, classroom cleanliness is not merely a matter of order, but also a concrete context in which children learn responsibility and care.

Environmental education has become increasingly important because environmental problems are closely connected to human behavior, values, and daily decision-making. Education for sustainable development emphasizes that learners need to develop knowledge, values, and action competencies that support responsible ways of living (UNESCO, 2020). At the elementary school level, these broad goals need to be translated into concrete classroom practices. Maintaining cleanliness, managing waste responsibly, and caring for learning spaces are practical forms of environmental responsibility that can be developed through school routines, teacher guidance, and repeated practice.

Previous studies show that environmental knowledge alone does not automatically lead to responsible environmental behavior. Students may understand the importance of environmental care, but their actions are also shaped by motivation, habits, social norms, perceived control, and opportunities to act (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Psychological barriers may also prevent individuals from responding to environmental problems, even when they recognize that action is needed (Gifford, 2011). In elementary classrooms, this problem appears when students know that cleanliness is important but still leave trash on the floor, ignore misplaced belongings, or wait for teacher reminders before acting.

Studies on children's pro-environmental behavior also emphasize the role of teacher modeling, peer behavior, self-efficacy, environmental experience, and classroom support (Liang et al., 2022; Liu & Green, 2024). Recent studies in elementary education further suggest that environmentally caring character can be strengthened through learning processes, problem-based learning, and school culture (Azkia et al., 2025; Hanifah et al., 2025; Rintoni et al., 2025). However, much of the existing literature still focuses on environmental knowledge, attitudes, or general pro-environmental behavior. Less attention has been given to why students ignore immediate environmental responsibilities that are visible, familiar, and embedded in everyday classroom routines.

This study focuses on environmental neglect in elementary classroom life. Environmental neglect refers to the tendency to disregard visible environmental responsibilities, avoid necessary action, or fail to respond to problems in one's immediate surroundings. This concept does not simply refer to a lack of information. A student who has never been taught about classroom cleanliness may fail to act because of limited knowledge. However, a student who understands that a messy classroom disrupts learning but still leaves trash on the floor demonstrates a different problem. Such behavior reflects a gap between awareness and action, or between knowing what is right and practicing responsibility.

Socratic-oriented reflection provides a relevant lens for examining this gap. Socratic thought emphasizes questioning, self-examination, and the recognition that one's understanding may be incomplete or inconsistent (Plato, 1997). In educational practice, Socratic

questioning can help learners examine assumptions, consider consequences, and reflect on whether their actions are consistent with the values they claim to understand (Wilberding, 2021). In this study, Socratic-oriented reflection is not positioned as a formal instructional intervention. Instead, it informs the reflective questionnaire used to explore how participants understand responsibility, consequences, neglect, and possible actions in everyday classroom situations.

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates several complementary perspectives. Socratic theory explains the role of questioning and self-examination in recognizing inconsistencies between knowledge and behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control may influence whether students act responsibly or remain passive (Ajzen, 1991). Self-Determination Theory highlights the importance of internalizing responsibility rather than depending only on external reminders (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Social Learning Theory explains how teacher modeling and peer behavior shape students' classroom habits (Bandura, 1986). The Ethics of Care frames environmental responsibility as a relational and moral issue because neglecting shared spaces can affect the comfort and well-being of others (Noddings, 2013). Together, these perspectives support the interpretation of environmental neglect as a reflective, motivational, social, and relational issue in environmental character education.

Based on these perspectives, this study conceptualizes environmental neglect as a reflective responsibility gap between students' awareness of environmental responsibility and their actual classroom behavior. Socratic-oriented reflection is used to examine how students recognize responsibility, consequences, and inconsistencies between knowing and acting. Environmental responsibility refers to students' willingness to maintain classroom cleanliness, care for shared spaces, and act without depending solely on teacher reminders. Character education provides the broader educational frame in which responsibility, care, self-regulation, and moral action are developed through routines, modeling, and reflective practice. The relationship among these concepts is presented in the conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1.

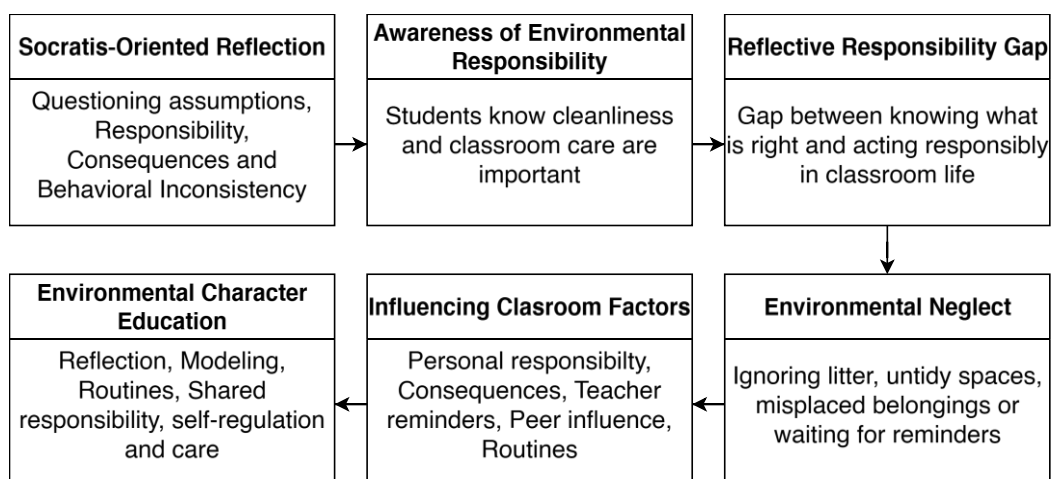


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Environmental Neglect as a Reflective Responsibility Gap

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to frame environmental neglect not merely as a lack of knowledge or ordinary classroom misbehavior, but as a reflective responsibility gap within elementary environmental character education. As shown in Figure 1, this perspective

connects Socratic-oriented reflection, environmental responsibility, and character education into one analytical framework. This framework extends previous discussions of environmental education by linking students' awareness, personal responsibility, dependence on reminders, peer influence, and understanding of consequences in everyday classroom routines.

This study is guided by the following research question: Why do members of an elementary school community neglect environmental responsibilities in everyday classroom life? To answer this question, the study analyzes participants' reflective responses concerning classroom cleanliness, responsibility, consequences, neglect, and possible educational strategies. The study contributes theoretically by positioning environmental neglect as a reflective responsibility gap in environmental character education. Practically, it offers implications for teachers and schools by emphasizing the need to combine Socratic-oriented reflective questioning, teacher modeling, classroom routines, reminders, and shared responsibility to help students transform environmental awareness into consistent responsible action.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore how members of an elementary school community understood environmental neglect, responsibility, classroom cleanliness, and reflective action in everyday school life. Qualitative description was considered appropriate because the study aimed to provide a clear and systematic account of participants' perceptions and meanings without imposing an overly abstract theoretical framework on the data (Sandelowski, 2000). The study did not implement Socratic reflection as a classroom intervention. Instead, Socratic-oriented reflection was used as the basis for developing open-ended questionnaire items that encouraged participants to examine responsibility, consequences, and the gap between knowing and acting.

A simple descriptive percentage was used only to summarize one closed-response item. This use of percentage did not change the qualitative orientation of the study. The main analysis remained focused on participants' written explanations, examples, and reflections, while the percentage was used only to describe response distribution.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Cendekia Harapan School, Bali, Indonesia, from August to November 2025. The school context was selected because the issue under investigation was closely related to daily classroom routines. These routines included classroom cleanliness after lunch, food waste or plastic packaging left behind, paper and stationery on the floor, untidy desks, misplaced belongings, and students' dependence on teacher reminders to clean the classroom or prepare learning materials.

Participants consisted of 21 members of the elementary school community, including 20 elementary school students and one teacher. The student participants were selected because they directly experienced the classroom situations examined in this study. The teacher participant was included as a key informant who provided an adult perspective on classroom routines, student responsibility, and environmental behavior in school life. The inclusion of one teacher was intended to complement students' reflective responses rather than to represent all teachers in the school.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct familiarity with everyday classroom routines and environmental responsibility. The number of participants was

considered adequate for a small-scale descriptive qualitative inquiry because the responses began to show recurring patterns related to responsibility, awareness of consequences, dependence on reminders, reluctance to act, and peer influence. Data collection was stopped when additional responses no longer produced substantially new categories relevant to the research question. Therefore, the adequacy of the sample was considered in relation to thematic sufficiency rather than statistical representation.

Research Instrument

Data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the research focus and the conceptual framework of the study, particularly Socratic-oriented reflection, environmental responsibility, and environmental character education. The questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect on their assumptions, actions, responsibilities, consequences, and possible solutions related to environmental neglect in classroom life.

The questionnaire included open-ended questions and one closed-response item. The open-ended questions asked participants to explain the meaning of responsibility, the importance of cleaning the surrounding environment, reasons why students sometimes do not clean even when they know cleanliness is important, experiences of ignoring something important, emotional responses to being ignored, possible actions when someone ignores an important situation, and suggested solutions to reduce harmful neglect. The closed-response item asked whether participants had ever told, asked, or wanted to force someone to speak the truth. This item was used only as a supporting reflective indicator and was not treated as the main focus of the study. To improve transparency, the main questionnaire items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Questionnaire Items

Focus Area	Questionnaire Item
Environmental awareness	Why is it important to clean our surroundings?
Responsibility	What does responsibility mean to you?
Environmental neglect	If students know that cleaning the environment is important, why do they sometimes not do it?
Reflective experience	Have you ever ignored something important? Please explain.
Emotional consequence	How would you feel if someone ignored something important about you?
Responsible response	What would you do if someone ignored an important situation?
Educational solution	What is one solution to reduce harmful neglect in the classroom or school environment?
Truth-seeking reflection	Have you ever told, asked, or wanted to force someone to speak the truth?

Instrument Validation

The questionnaire was reviewed before data collection to ensure that the items were relevant to the research focus, understandable for elementary school students, and appropriate for reflective inquiry. The review focused on three aspects: content relevance, clarity of language, and suitability for the age level of the participants. The items were checked to ensure

that they addressed environmental responsibility, classroom cleanliness, consequences, neglect, and possible responsible action.

The questionnaire items were also reviewed by the supervising teacher to ensure that the wording was age-appropriate and did not lead, blame, or pressure students. Revisions were made to clarify several questions so that participants could respond reflectively in their own words. A formal pilot test was not conducted; however, the questionnaire was checked for clarity and suitability before distribution. This limitation is acknowledged in the conclusion.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using an online questionnaire. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the use of their responses for research purposes. They were also informed that the study aimed to understand environmental responsibility as an educational issue rather than to blame individual students.

The online format was selected because it allowed participants to respond individually and reflectively. It also helped protect anonymity because participants were not required to write personal identifiers in the questionnaire. The data collection process was conducted in a manner appropriate to the school context and did not involve punishment, grading, or individual evaluation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis followed several stages adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). First, all responses were read repeatedly to build familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful statements related to classroom cleanliness, responsibility, neglect, consequences, reminders, peer influence, emotions, and proposed solutions were identified. Third, these statements were assigned initial codes. Fourth, similar codes were grouped into categories. Fifth, the categories were refined into broader themes that addressed the research question. Finally, representative quotations were selected to support the interpretation of each theme.

The analysis was conducted manually without qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti. Manual coding was considered sufficient because the dataset was relatively small and consisted of short written responses from 21 participants. To maintain analytic consistency, the researchers used a coding log to record initial codes, category decisions, theme development, and revisions during the analysis process.

For example, a response such as “because they don’t know the consequences or risk of dirty or messy environments” was initially coded as “limited awareness of consequences.” This code was then grouped into the category of consequence awareness and later developed as one of the main themes explaining environmental neglect. Similarly, responses indicating that students clean only after being reminded were coded as “dependence on reminders” and later interpreted as a sign of limited internalized responsibility.

The closed-response item was analyzed using simple frequency and percentage calculations. These results were used only to describe the distribution of responses and to complement the qualitative findings. They were not used for inferential statistical analysis.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was supported through repeated reading of participants’ responses, comparison of similar and contrasting answers, and the use of direct quotations to support the interpretation of themes.

Triangulation was limited but was supported by the inclusion of both student and teacher perspectives. Although the teacher participant did not represent all teachers, the teacher's response helped contextualize students' reflections within everyday classroom routines.

Dependability was supported through an audit trail consisting of questionnaire items, raw response summaries, coding notes, category development, and theme refinement. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding the interpretation in participants' written responses rather than relying only on the researchers' assumptions. Peer debriefing was conducted through discussion between the researchers during the coding and theme development process. Differences in interpretation were discussed until agreement was reached.

Member checking was not conducted because the data were collected anonymously through an online questionnaire. This limitation is acknowledged in the conclusion. Nevertheless, the use of direct quotations and transparent coding examples was intended to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed by protecting participants' anonymity, avoiding personal identifiers, and ensuring that the questionnaire did not blame or judge individual students. The purpose of the study was explained as an educational inquiry into environmental responsibility and classroom life. Participation was voluntary, and responses were used only for research purposes.

Because the study involved elementary school students, the researchers followed the school's internal procedure for classroom-based reflective inquiry. Permission was obtained from the school authority before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the questionnaire, and their responses were collected anonymously. The study did not collect sensitive personal data, did not report student names, and did not involve intervention, grading, punishment, or individual evaluation. No formal institutional review board approval was obtained; therefore, this is acknowledged as a methodological limitation.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings are organized into five thematic areas: participants' understanding of classroom cleanliness, responsibility, factors contributing to environmental neglect, emotional and relational meanings of neglect, and proposed educational strategies. The truth-seeking item is presented at the end as a supporting reflective indicator rather than as the central focus of the study. Although one closed-response item is reported using simple frequency and percentage, the main purpose of the analysis remains qualitative. The percentages are used only to describe the distribution of responses and not to make statistical claims.

Participants associated classroom cleanliness with comfort, order, and learning. A clean classroom was not viewed only as a physical condition, but also as a shared environment that supports learning. One participant stated, "It is important because our classroom is our environment and will be uncomfortable for us to learn." This statement shows that participants were able to connect environmental care with their own learning experience. Classroom cleanliness was therefore understood as a condition that affects concentration, comfort, and the quality of daily school life.

At the same time, the findings suggest that awareness of cleanliness did not always lead to consistent responsible behavior. Participants recognized that a messy classroom could disturb learning, but they also described situations in which students still ignored trash, untidy desks,

or misplaced belongings. This indicates that the problem was not simply that students did not know cleanliness was important. Rather, environmental neglect appeared when students failed to translate this awareness into action.

Participants also understood responsibility as a personal duty connected to one's role in the classroom community. One participant explained, "It means something that we need to do and it becomes our role." This response indicates that responsibility was understood not only as obedience to teacher instruction, but also as an obligation that belongs to the person who is part of the classroom community. However, the findings show that this understanding was still unstable. Some students could define responsibility, but their actions remained dependent on reminders, peer behavior, or the presence of external control.

Several factors contributed to environmental neglect in classroom life. The first factor was limited awareness of consequences. One participant explained that students sometimes do not clean the classroom "because they don't know the consequences or risk of dirty or messy environments." This response suggests that some students may see trash, untidy desks, or misplaced materials as small problems rather than as issues that affect comfort, learning, and other people's work. When the consequence is not immediate, students may not feel responsible for acting.

The second factor was weak personal responsibility. Participants' responses suggest that some students know what should be done but do not treat the task as their own duty. This finding is important because it shows a difference between knowing a rule and internalizing responsibility. The third factor was dependence on teacher reminders. Students may clean or prepare learning materials only after teachers or others remind them. This pattern indicates that responsible behavior has not fully become self-directed. The fourth factor was reluctance to act, which appeared when students ignored tasks because they did not want to make the effort. The fifth factor was social influence, as students may follow peers who also ignore classroom problems.

To clarify the thematic patterns found in participants' responses, the factors contributing to classroom environmental neglect are summarized in Table 2. The table does not function as a statistical classification, but as a qualitative synthesis of recurring meanings found in the participants' written responses.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Classroom Environmental Neglect

Theme	Evidence from Responses	Qualitative Interpretation
Limited awareness of consequences	"Because they don't know the consequences or risk of dirty or messy environments."	Students may not connect small classroom problems with broader effects on comfort, learning, and others' responsibilities.
Weak personal responsibility	Students know cleanliness is important but do not treat it as their own duty.	Responsibility is understood conceptually but not always internalized as personal action.
Dependence on reminders	Students clean only after being reminded by teachers or others.	Responsible behavior remains externally controlled rather than self-directed.
Reluctance to act	Students ignore cleaning because they do not want to make the effort.	Neglect may involve unwillingness to act, not only lack of knowledge.

Theme	Evidence from Responses	Qualitative Interpretation
Social influence	Students may follow others who also ignore the problem.	Classroom norms and peer behavior can normalize neglect.

Participants were also asked whether they had ever ignored something important. Eleven participants answered “No,” while ten participants admitted that they had ignored something important before. This nearly balanced distribution is meaningful because it shows two different reflective positions. Some participants distanced themselves from neglect, while others were able to admit and evaluate their own behavior. Several participants who admitted neglect described it as a wrong or bad decision. This finding suggests that Socratic-oriented reflective questions can reveal whether students are willing to examine their own actions, not merely comment on the behavior of others.

The emotional dimension of neglect also emerged strongly. When participants were asked how they would feel if someone ignored something important about them, most responses included emotions such as sad, upset, or hurt. These responses indicate that participants did not understand neglect only as failure to complete a task. Neglect was also experienced as relational because it could make someone feel unheard, disrespected, or uncared for. In classroom environmental responsibility, this means that leaving trash or mess behind is not only a cleanliness issue. It may also create discomfort or additional work for classmates, teachers, or other members of the school community.

Participants proposed several responses when someone ignores an important situation. Their answers included reminding the person, showing a good example, helping directly, or asking a teacher, leader, or responsible person for support. These responses show that students did not only expect punishment or teacher control. They also recognized that responsibility can be strengthened through peer reminders, modeling, direct help, and shared action. Participants also suggested several actions that could be taken when someone ignores an important situation. These responses show how students understood responsibility not only as individual awareness, but also as social action involving reminders, examples, help, and support from others. The proposed responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants’ proposed responses to neglect

Proposed Response	Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Reminding	Participants would tell or remind the person about the important matter.	Students see verbal reminders as a way to activate awareness and responsibility.
Modeling	Participants would show a good example.	Students recognize that behavior can be influenced through visible action.
Helping	Participants would help the person or address the situation directly.	Responsibility is understood as active participation, not only advice.
Seeking support	Participants would ask a teacher, leader, or responsible person for help.	Students still view adult or authority support as important in maintaining classroom responsibility.

In the final question, participants suggested several ways to reduce harmful neglect. Their suggestions included educating others, giving reminders, warning people when necessary, building community awareness, and teaching students to be more aware of consequences. More practical strategies included student clean-up schedules, class reminders, reward systems, teacher modeling, and reflection sessions. These responses indicate that participants did not see questioning alone as sufficient. Instead, they emphasized the need to combine reflection with routines, examples, reminders, and practical classroom action.

Table 4. Suggested Educational Strategies for Reducing Environmental Neglect

Strategy	Function	Qualitative Interpretation
Student clean-up schedule	Gives students a clear role in maintaining classroom cleanliness.	Helps transform responsibility from teacher instruction into student-owned routine.
Class reminders	Helps students remember repeated responsibilities.	Useful as a transitional support before responsibility becomes internalized.
Reward system	Provides initial motivation for responsible behavior.	May encourage participation, but should be combined with reflection to avoid dependence on external rewards.
Reflection sessions	Encourages students to evaluate actions and consequences.	Supports the development of awareness, self-examination, and responsibility.
Teacher modeling	Demonstrates responsible action through example.	Makes environmental responsibility visible and imitable for students.
Community awareness	Builds shared responsibility beyond individual students.	Positions cleanliness as a collective responsibility rather than an individual task.

The truth-seeking item provided additional insight into participants' reflective orientation. Participants were asked whether they had ever told, asked, or wanted to force someone to speak the truth. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 5. This item is not interpreted as a measurement of honesty or moral development. Instead, it is treated as a supporting indicator of participants' willingness to engage with questions of truth, responsibility, and response to important situations.

Table 5. Participants' responses to the truth-seeking question

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	47.6%
Maybe	6	28.6%
I'm not sure	2	9.5%
No	1	4.8%
Not really, but if it is urgent I do	1	4.8%
Yes, but never force	1	4.8%
Total	21	100%

The largest proportion of participants selected “Yes” at 47.6%, followed by “Maybe” at 28.6%. Because this study is qualitative, these percentages are not used to generalize the findings to a wider population. Rather, they provide a descriptive overview of response distribution within this small participant group. The qualitative significance of this item lies in the variation of responses. Some participants positioned themselves as willing to ask for truth directly, some were uncertain, and others qualified their answers by noting urgency or the need not to force others. This variation supports the broader finding that students’ reflective awareness is not uniform.

Overall, the findings show that environmental neglect in classroom life is not merely a knowledge problem. Participants recognized the importance of cleanliness and could define responsibility, yet several barriers prevented consistent action. These barriers included limited awareness of consequences, weak personal responsibility, dependence on reminders, reluctance to act, and peer influence. The findings also show that neglect has emotional and relational meanings because students associated being ignored with sadness, hurt, and disappointment. Therefore, environmental responsibility in elementary classrooms requires more than rules or information. It requires reflective questioning, teacher modeling, student-led routines, reminders, and shared responsibility that help students move from knowing what is right to practicing it consistently.

Discussion

The findings show that environmental neglect in elementary classroom life cannot be explained merely as a lack of environmental knowledge. Participants recognized that classroom cleanliness was important for comfort and learning, and they were able to define responsibility as something connected to one’s role. However, this awareness did not always lead to consistent action. Students may still leave trash, ignore untidy spaces, or wait for teacher reminders before acting. This finding suggests that environmental neglect is better understood as a gap between knowing and acting. Previous studies have shown that environmental knowledge and attitudes do not automatically produce responsible environmental behavior because behavior is also shaped by motivation, habit, perceived control, and social context (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Steg & Vlek, 2009). The present study extends this discussion by showing how this gap appears in small but meaningful classroom routines, such as cleaning after lunch, preparing learning materials, and responding to visible mess. Therefore, the contribution of this study is to frame environmental neglect as a reflective responsibility gap within elementary environmental character education.

One important finding is that students may ignore environmental responsibilities because they do not clearly recognize the consequences of their actions. A messy classroom, trash on the floor, or misplaced belongings may appear to students as minor problems, especially when the effects are not immediate. However, these small actions can affect learning comfort, create additional work for others, and weaken shared responsibility in the classroom. This finding is consistent with Gifford’s (2011) explanation that environmental inaction may occur because consequences are often indirect, delayed, or psychologically distant. In the classroom context, the contribution of this study is to show that consequence awareness needs to be made concrete and relational for young learners. Teachers should not only remind students to clean, but also guide them to reflect on who is affected, what happens if everyone ignores the same problem, and why shared spaces require shared care.

The findings also reveal that dependence on teacher reminders is a major feature of environmental neglect. Students may act responsibly only when teachers ask them to clean or prepare their materials. This pattern indicates that responsibility has not yet been fully internalized. Self-Determination Theory explains that behavior becomes more sustainable when individuals internalize values and experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The present study extends this theory into the context of environmental character education by showing that repeated reminders are useful but insufficient if they do not gradually lead students toward self-directed responsibility. Educationally, teachers may begin with reminders and checklists, but these supports should gradually be transferred to student-led routines, rotating classroom roles, and reflection sessions that help students understand why the responsibility belongs to them.

Another finding concerns the role of peer influence and classroom norms. Some students may ignore classroom problems because others also ignore them, while others suggested that giving reminders, showing examples, and helping directly could reduce neglect. This finding supports the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the influence of subjective norms and perceived behavioral control on behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It also aligns with Social Learning Theory, which explains that children learn by observing and imitating meaningful models (Bandura, 1986). The contribution of the present study is to show that peer influence can operate in two directions. It can normalize neglect when students collectively ignore mess, but it can also strengthen responsibility when students model care, remind one another respectfully, and participate in shared routines. Therefore, classroom environmental education should not depend only on teacher authority, but also cultivate positive peer norms and student leadership.

Teacher modeling also emerged as an important educational response. In elementary classrooms, students learn responsibility not only from verbal instruction but also from visible examples. When teachers demonstrate care for shared spaces, explain the meaning of responsible action, and invite students to participate, responsibility becomes a practiced classroom value. This finding is consistent with studies showing that role models can influence children's pro-environmental behavior (Liang et al., 2022). However, the present study adds that modeling should not make students passive observers. If teachers repeatedly clean students' mess without involving them, students may learn that adults are responsible for solving classroom problems. Therefore, teacher modeling should be participatory. Teachers need to demonstrate responsible action, explain its consequences, involve students in the process, and gradually transfer ownership to them.

The emotional responses of participants show that neglect is not only behavioral but also relational. Participants associated being ignored with feeling sad, upset, or hurt. This indicates that neglect can be understood as a failure of care, not merely a failure to complete a task. Noddings' (2013) *Ethics of Care* helps explain this finding because responsibility in a shared space is connected to concern for others' comfort and well-being. The present study contributes to character education by showing that classroom cleanliness is a moral and relational practice. Leaving a classroom dirty may not be intended to harm others, but it can create discomfort, additional work, and a feeling that shared needs are being ignored. Educationally, teachers can use reflective questions to help students connect classroom care with empathy, fairness, and respect for others.

Socratic-oriented reflection is central to interpreting these findings. The issue is not only whether students know that cleanliness is important, but whether they examine the inconsistency between what they know and what they do. Socratic thought emphasizes self-examination and awareness of the limits of one's understanding (Plato, 1997; Wilberding,

2021). In this study, Socratic-oriented questions helped reveal that students could define responsibility, recognize consequences, and describe appropriate responses, but still identified barriers to consistent action. This extends Socratic reflection beyond abstract questioning by applying it to concrete classroom routines. The theoretical contribution is that Socratic-oriented reflection can be used to understand environmental neglect as a problem of reflective inconsistency, where students know what is right but have not yet developed the habit, motivation, or sense of ownership needed to act.

At the same time, the findings show that reflection alone is not enough. Participants suggested reminders, examples, clean-up schedules, rewards, teacher modeling, community awareness, and reflection sessions. These suggestions indicate that students see environmental responsibility as requiring both reflective and practical support. This finding extends previous discussions of environmental education by showing that Socratic-oriented reflection needs to be combined with habit formation, social modeling, classroom routines, and shared responsibility. Environmental character education should therefore integrate reflective questioning with daily practices. Questions such as “Who is affected when the classroom is messy?”, “Why do we wait for reminders?”, and “What should we do when we see a problem?” can be followed by concrete routines such as student-led clean-up roles, visual reminders, and regular class reflection.

Overall, this study contributes to elementary environmental education by reframing environmental neglect as a reflective responsibility gap. Previous studies have emphasized environmental knowledge, attitudes, behavior, role models, and school culture (Ardoin et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2022; Liu & Green, 2024; Rintoni et al., 2025). This study extends that literature by focusing on the everyday classroom situations in which students know what should be done but do not consistently act on that knowledge. The findings show that environmental responsibility develops through the interaction of reflection, internalized motivation, peer norms, teacher modeling, routines, and care for others. Therefore, clean classrooms, prepared learning materials, and shared responsibility should not be treated as minor classroom management issues. They are practical sites for developing environmental character, self-regulation, moral awareness, and collective responsibility in elementary education.

Conclusion

This study shows that environmental neglect in elementary classroom life is not merely caused by limited knowledge, but reflects a gap between students’ awareness and responsible action. Although students may understand the importance of classroom cleanliness and define responsibility as part of their role, their behavior can still be influenced by weak personal responsibility, limited awareness of consequences, dependence on teacher reminders, reluctance to act, and peer influence. Theoretically, this study contributes to environmental character education by framing environmental neglect as a reflective responsibility gap that involves cognitive, motivational, social, and relational dimensions. Practically, the findings suggest that elementary schools should combine Socratic-oriented reflective questioning with teacher modeling, student-led routines, reminders, and shared classroom responsibility to help students transform awareness into consistent action. At the policy level, environmental responsibility should be integrated into classroom culture rather than treated only as a cleanliness rule. However, this study is limited by its small participant group, single-school context, self-reported responses, absence of classroom observation, and lack of a structured intervention. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse participants, combine questionnaires with

observations or interviews, and examine the effectiveness of Socratic-oriented reflection as an educational strategy for strengthening environmental responsibility.

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