



THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE ADOPTION OF A SUSTAINABLE LIFE STYLE IN A SOCIETY

Abdullah Karataş

Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences,
Social Environmental Sciences PhD(c),
abdullahkaratas3@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Today, human-centered perspective has great effects on the emergence of global environmental problems. Cruelly and unconsciously consumption of the natural resources for the sake of more profit caused this result. Following the industrial revolution, global environmental problems, emerging with the instrumentalisation of nature for the purposes of human, threat the sustainability of all living things. Therefore, people should immediately adopt a life style in harmony with the nature. Ensuring such a harmony, the environmental education activities are of great importance. Individuals, given environmental awareness through environmental education, can play an active role in solving environmental problems and restructure the relationship between human and nature as environmental volunteers. The idea of protecting nature can be given to society by means of environmental education. To reach more sustainable future, environmental awareness of people should be raised and sustainability should be part of their lives. Economic and social aspects of environmental problems should be explained clearly through environmental education. The future of all living things depends on such an awareness raising activity. This theoretical study aims to put forward the importance of environmental education in the adoption of a sustainable life style in a society.

Key Words: Environmental Education, Environmental Problems, Environmental Awareness, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Today, people should be awakened against the global environmental problems with their increasing effects as soon as possible. Since, especially in the post-industrial revolution period, with the aid of technology, people lead to unconscious consumption of resources by degrading the environment into a means and they have always been in an unilateral action in the relation with environment. The extinct natural resources and the contaminated nature by the human centered view can be considered as the basic reasons of global environmental problems that even people cannot overcome in today. Environmental education activities have crucial importance on the rising awakening of people by protecting and improving the environment. Especially, parents should not be ignored with the environmental education activities in the scope of non-formal education in the villages, city centers and work places with substantial participation. Since education starts in family, primarily parents need to be awakened with the environmental education. Besides, the fact should not be ignored that the individuals living in a society are the people who can best know the environmental problems of society and the participation of environmental education should be increased as far as possible. Teachers who are shaping the future society take big missions and responsibilities in this issue. The love of nature and environmental consciousness to the children by way of education of teachers can lead them to be eco-friendly individuals in the future. In order to pass a safer and healthier future on the next generations, it should be struggle against the environmental problems by increasing environmental education in the whole society because it can only be possible with education to change the behaviors and views of people in an intended way.

2. The Environment and Environmental Education as a Concept



A new species is added into the extinct species day by day with the contaminated and converted nature, desertificated forests, drought and melting glaciers because all living creatures are in need of their environment to live. It cannot be said that they can survive without water, food, shelter and air. The sustainability of their vital functions depends on the environment they live.

The environment that has a crucial importance on the life of all living creatures can be defined as the physical, biological, social, economic and cultural setting of creatures, which they are in contact with each other throughout their lives and they are in a mutual interaction (T.C Environmental Law). Environment is the whole of all biotic and abiotic factors (social, cultural, historical, climatic and physical) which affect a living creature or a living community throughout their lives (Yücel & Morgil, 1998, p. 84). The concept of environment reflects the mutual relationships of people and the interaction between them in this process as well as the mutual relationship and the interaction of people with all the other living creatures other than themselves such as plant and animal species and all the other non-livings which are outside of the world of living creatures but exist in the environment of them such as air, water, soil, underground treasures and climate (Keleş, Hamamcı & Çoban, 2009: 52). As far as understood from the definitions, environment constitutes a dramatic importance for the living creatures.

The environment that people live in and feel their existence concretely as well as their features and quality is physical environment. Physical environment can be analyzed in two parts as natural and artificial. Natural environment has no human contribution in its creation, in contrast people find it ready and its components gather into two groups as living and non-livings. Human beings, plants and animals constitute the living elements of natural environment, on the other hand, the crucial needs for the survival such as air, water, soil, the layers of earth crust and the underground treasures constitute the non-living elements of natural environment. Artificial environment is the environment that people find on the basis of their knowledge and culture using the underground and overland treasures and create on their own in their natural environment. Its basic feature is being handmade (Keleş et al., 2009: 53-54).

The whole relations in the scope of economic, social and political arrangements of people that involve in a physical environment form social environment (Keleş et al., 2009: 55). There are lots of environments that people involve such as family, relative, school and work. All of these groups which are different from each other in terms of their aim, quality and width are named as “social environment” (T.C. Ministry of National Educational, 2009). Protecting and improving the physical environment can be achieved by the individuals who have protectionist behaviors and improved environmental awareness. At this point, environmental education can lead people.

The basis of environmental education is for protection of nature and natural resources and it not only informs people but also affects their behaviors. The primary aim of environmental education can be stated as forming favorable and permanent behavioral change and making individuals active participator in the solution of problems (Şimşekli, 2004, p. 84). Environmental education can be defined as a lifelong interdisciplinary approach that is conscious about the environment and environmental concerns, contributive about the



available environmental problems and it has the purpose of developing a world population which has the preventive knowledge, skill, manner, incentive, personal and social mission and responsibilities against the new formations (Deniş & Genç, 2010, p. 9). Environmental education can be seen as a key of a more sustainable life style.

3. A General View for The Concept of Sustainability

Global environmental problems affect the whole earth without limitations and revoke the right of living in a cleaner and more livable environment of next generations. Therefore, every individual in a society must have behaviors that are compatible with environment and conscious of sustainability without forgetting their responsibility against environment. Otherwise, it cannot be said that next generations will have much chance.

Sustainability as a concept means that fulfilling the needs of today without putting the ability of meeting their own needs of next generations at risk (Namuth, Fritz, King & Bore, 2005: 182). This concept first used in the report that is called “Our Common Future” (The report of Brundtland) released by The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) under the presidency of Prime Minister of Norway – Gro Harlem Brundtland in 1987 (Aksu, 2011, p. 6) The global environmental problems can be solved with such a development approach in the society. However, when the practices are observed, the concept of sustainability is mostly perceived as an economic view. This perspective causes the perception of sustainable growth rather than sustainable development. But the actual aim can be indicated as sustainable development. Providing sustainable development will be achieved by placing the economy into the ecologic quarters rather than seeing ecology as a component in the general economy (Uslu, 1998, p. 43). In this context, the basic principles of sustainable development can be range as in the followings (Çoban, 2010, p. 570-571):

- **Justice:** It reflects the economic and social justice in generation and between the current and next generations.
- **Participation:** It reflects a democratic process in the decision-making about the environment and application of them as well as considering the opinions of local communities about their own economic activities.
- **Conservation(Caution):** It reflect the existence of a doubt of unavoided risks can be sufficient enough to not attempt to the subject activity with a cautious view of government and investor even if the existence of a proof that shows the danger against environment.
- **Integrated Policy:** It reflects the integration of the precautions of environmental protection with primarily economy and all the other policies and sectors.
- **Planning:** It reflects the planning of what and how will be achieved in a participative process on the basis of the complex and multi directional relations between social, political, economic elements and the environment (Çoban, 2010, p. 570-571).

Education has a crucial importance on the supplying of a sustainable society. Children, the young and all the old persons in a society, who realize the importance of sustainable life with education, can make it a life style for themselves by internalizing sustainability. Environmental education will lead them in this issue. The individuals that are conscious in



environmental education can show as much efforts as they can for the sustainability of a life style compatible with nature for passing a healthier and secure world to the next generations.

5. The Importance of Environmental Education in Sustainability

The necessity of environmental education can be said to be acknowledged almost all over the world. In every field of life and in every grade from preschool to university, environmental education gains importance. Primarily, the environmental sensibility that is available in society is expected to be increased with the environmental education (Gülay & Önder, 2011, p. 47). In this sense, extensive conscious and awareness should be targeted for every people ranging from children to adults with environmental education. When the informative programs which will be rapidly applied with the aid of communication devices are firstly provided for children, it can be possible to get favorable outcomes after a few generations. And with the adults' education, when the natural awareness is extended, the perspectives for the problems will be under control and appropriate policies can be generated. Our future assurance and the persistence of human being can only be provided with such precautions and conscious (Alpagut, 1997:, p. 118-119).

The environmental education as a part of lifelong education must be prior to every stage of active participation of individuals and the participation process of individuals both as an educator and a participant with reference to the point that every individual has the right of environmental education and instruction as indicated in the constitution. Environmental education can be applied in manufactories, fields, work places and on the job with this aim. New manners and behaviors about the environment can be gained in the scope of that act. An appropriate environment can be provided for educating society about those issues at the education focused centers such as social education and development centers, public councils, village councils, city councils and the environmental residences. In the scope of environmental education, trips for learning natural environment and history, videos, films, walks, climbing, writings, paintings and photography competitions can be arranged. Museums, libraries, national parks and ruins can be used for this aim. In this context, it can be clearly said that environmental educators should have different features from teachers in the class. Primarily, environmental educators, who should have the sensibility for the environment, must have an interdisciplinary environmental education and this has a dramatic importance for making connection between various professional fields and environmental problems. Teachers are expected to be leader in the revealing the environmental problems, in the process of solution with them, and in the activation of required attempts and actions (Geray, 1997, p. 333-337). All the teachers who are on duty at the different grades of formal education have crucial importance for both applied and theoretical environmental education as well as impressing environmental conscious on the next generations and generating permanent solutions for the environmental problems. In this issue, supporting teachers with in service training programs for the sake of students should not be disregarded.

Environmental education is the key point for providing sustainability. Therefore, the idea of sustainable development that especially gains importance in the mid-80's can be said to gain acceleration towards the sustainable environmental education and become a dominant



view today. Interchanging “The International Environmental Education Program” with “Education for a Sustainable Future” can be shown as an example for that (Tanrıverdi, 2009, p. 91). The individuals whose environmental conscious is increased with such an education promise hope for a more livable world. However environmental conscious is not sufficient on its own even if it is an environmental protector as well as being an important precondition for the preventive exercises against environmental pollution. It requires the complete participation of the whole society. The individuals whose environmental conscious is increased with such an education promise hope for a more livable world. However environmental conscious is not sufficient on its own even if it is an environmental protector as well as being an important precondition for the preventive exercises against environmental pollution. It requires the complete participation of the whole society. Unless individuals and families don't participate individually and wrong habits are not changed, solution of the problems are getting harder. The person who has responsibility of environment is the one choosing the least negative way and method when he produces and consumes in his daily life. Environmental education can be said to be indispensable for using environment in a rational way and preventing the consumption and pollution resulted from misuse of it (Bener & Babaoğul, 2008). To actualize sustainability and to reach a sustainable structure of a society, it should be provided that individuals have the conscious with environmental education and they make it a life philosophy.

6. Conclusion

Sustainability has a crucial importance for the future of a society. Every individual should take the responsibility of protecting environment and developing it. Otherwise, they will be suffering from the outcomes with the other livings. In spite of this situation, people keep their devastating and eradicating activities for the sake of more and more income. The intended outcomes are not achieved unless the behaviors and views of people against environment are not changed even if some precautions are taken with deterrent punishments and protective laws to some extent. In fact, a life style compatible with environment can be provided within the scope of consciousness activities for every age group in every stage of society with environmental education. If the consciousness of protecting and developing environment for a healthier and safer future is given for the whole society with environmental education in the scope of either non-formal or formal education, sustainability can serve for its actual aim. Otherwise, sustainability cannot go further to be just a concept that needs to be learned.

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