

IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE CITIZENSHIP

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Received December 2023; Accepted January 2024; Published February 2024;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31407/ijeess14.101>

ABSTRACT

The ecological crisis is one of the major difficulties of the twenty-first century that the world is currently experiencing. The present paper aims to explore the situation of environmental knowledge and education system in Albania. It will also highlight whether environmental education must be strengthened to better prepare schools to teach about environmental issues and to communicate the spirit and environmental components of textbooks at the right level. An individual's civic, social, and democratic commitments are directly reflected in their attitudes toward the environment.

Keywords: environmental knowledge, environment education, sustainability, ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation can be seen and confirmed locally and globally due to the devastating effects that the capitalist economic models and the high consumption rates of the industrial society in which we live have had on ecosystems (Montini & Volpe, 2019; Folmer & Piersma, 2007).

Aiming to educate people who are aware of environmental issues and possess the necessary information, skills, attitude, motivation, and sense of personal and social responsibility, as well as the ability to help solve environmental problems, environmental education is an interdisciplinary approach. Increasing people's awareness of the environment is, in this sense, one of the most significant and ultimate objectives of environmental education (Kopnina,2020; Zheng et al.,2017).

Research argues that environmental knowledge primarily consists of information, attitudes, and proactive involvement in a sustainable environment (Gunderson,2017; Fraj-Andrés, & Martínez). Research indicates that environmental knowledge might be crucial in modifying and addressing people's environmental behaviors and promoting sustainability in society (Montini & Volpe,2019).

Environmental attitudes are defined as personal ties to environmental issues. An individual's attitude toward the preservation or utilization of the environment is shaped by social groups with similar views. A person's attitude toward the environment can impact their later environmental behavior. The issue of environmental sensibility and education has been acknowledged and tackled by numerous international agendas for over 40 years, making inroads into the fields of politics, science, and education. Environmental education, or EA, was developed to address the educational aspect of ecological concerns. After this, EA becomes a viable solution in countries looking to encourage environmental conservation (Mubita et al.,2022).

Essentially, the participating international organizations saw it as a cornerstone approach for people to educate themselves about environmental issues and work together to restore a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature, with the goal being to prevent the emergence of new, more serious environmental issues and guarantee a more harmonious world for future generations (Mubita et al.,2022).

In Albania, environmental issues are found in very few school textbooks, mostly those used to teach biology. This at least partially explains why environmental issues are not on people's minds in Albania today, since it most likely mirrors the current scenario at school (Sokoli & Doka,2004; Hall,2004). Very few books for primary school students that cover environmental subjects are mostly published under international projects for kids and schools in 2018, but not integrated in the school curricula.

Raising environmental consciousness in elementary schools is especially crucial because it is believed that focusing on emotional concern for living things is most appropriate between the first and fifth grades (Araneo,2023). The present article aims to examine the significance of planning and executing environmental education initiatives in Albania's schools under the new curriculum framework.

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN ALBANIA

The 17 goals of UN Agenda 2030 are meant to be fulfilled by 2030 to ensure sustainable development and coexistence (2023). In addition to protecting the environment and natural resources, the goals also include building inclusive communities and lifestyles that uphold people's fundamental rights. Health, psycho-physical well-being, food security, job equality, equitable access to education, and the preservation of communities' material and immaterial assets are the most important of these (Sandoval-Riviera,2019).

This core may include matters of health education, environmental protection, civil protection, and respect for common goods and animals. Environmental degradation in the Republic of Albania is addressed as a very concerning phenomenon for the first time in the state's most important strategic document. The influence of the environment on national security was evaluated for the first time in 2004 and then it was approved in 2014 with "*National Security Strategy*" framework.

Environmental pollution was designated as both a global concern and a risk with a growing trend for people's lives and the safety of the Republic of Albania. It concludes that Albanian nature must be preserved and regenerated to provide an ecosystem and good living conditions for the populace and society. In the interest of Albania's sustainable development, national interests demand that steps be taken to ensure the wise use of natural resources through the creation of a balanced sectoral policy for environmental protection.

The policy included the preservation of the environment and natural resources as one of its primary security goals. It claims that natural resources and the environment are endless supplies for creating security instruments (Paragraph 16/4). This deterioration manifests itself in several ways, including the disorganized expansion of metropolitan areas, extensive deforestation, harm to agricultural areas, elevated levels of pollution in water basins, and river erosion. The Republic of Albania declared environmental preservation and sustainable resource use to be strategic security priorities (Paragraph 55).

Environmental degradation and natural catastrophes—including deforestation, pollution of rivers, environmental damage, and natural disasters brought on by industry or human influence - have been classified as the Republic of Albania's top risks in this strategy plan. The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania, in page 21,

defines as a strategic necessity the preservation of the environment for future generations, the prevention of environmental degradation, and the reduction of the effects of climate change through effective basin management, the expansion of forest areas, the integrated treatment of urban waste, and collaboration with civil society to raise public awareness of environmental preservation. Law No. 44/2019, "On some additions and changes to Law No. 7895, dated 27.1.1995, "Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania", as amended," was enacted in 2019 to strengthen the penalties for existing environmental crimes and add new ones to increase the effectiveness of the fight against environmental crimes.

These modifications were also implemented to bring this field's laws into compliance with EU regulations. The directive "On the protection of the environment through criminal legislation," dated November 19, 2008, by the European Parliament and the Council, dated 6.12.2008.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

To create positive changes in our environment and forge the necessary relationships with the community where we live, environmental education is a communication approach that communicates love and concern for nature (Sokoli & Dako, 2004).

Environmental education plays a crucial role in helping people become more civically engaged in society by increasing their awareness of the environment in which they live and by helping them acquire the skills and behaviors necessary to improve the quality of the environment (Sandoval-Riviera, 2019). When it comes to the Albanian educational system, everyone involved—teachers, students, school administrators, parents, and community members serving on school boards—must have certain attitudes and behaviors ingrained in them.

According to Busi et al. (2023), these should be inherent in the way environmental topics are taught in curricula and textbooks, how environmental education-related concerns are assessed in our school, and how students are exposed to the real world through assignments, classes, extracurricular activities, and teaching tasks. One of the most crucial elements in the development of people with strong environmental awareness and conduct is environmental education (Mubita et al., 2019).

Scholars argue that environmental education aids in the comprehension and resolution of environmental issues (Mubita et al., 2019) emphasize the importance of environmental education as "*the development of environmental awareness among individuals, the adoption of environmentally sensitive, positive, and permanent behavioral changes, the protection of natural, historical, cultural, and social values (aesthetic), ensuring active participation and undertaking the task of solving environmental problems, or recognizing and distinguishing values, attitudes, and concepts related to the bio-physical and social environment of individuals.*" Environmental education can change a person's beliefs and attitudes toward the environment and influence his behavior over time (Piskova et al., 2023).

Studies show that to change and address human environmental behaviors and return societies to sustainability, environmental knowledge can play an important role. Environmental attitude groups shape a person's disposition towards protecting or using the environment. A person's attitude toward the environment can influence later environmental behavior.

Although environmental knowledge is considered important in demonstrating environmental behavior, it is the individual's attitude and sense of environmental responsibility towards the environment that shape a friendly environmental behavior. Environmental attitudes, thus, play an important role in determining environmental behavior (Piskova et al., 2023).

An environment-based school curricula and teachers' environmental knowledge and beliefs, as well as how environmental education is developed, are also important variables that influence how students learn about environmental issues. The term environmental education in our educational system means the process of recognizing and clarifying concepts, developing certain skills and attitudes, and understanding and evaluating human interaction with his environment, culture and the physiological environment surrounding it (Sokoli & Dako, 2004).

It is aimed at enhancing personal responsibility in decision-making and developing codes of conduct for issues related to environmental quality and its conservation, carried out in two main directions. If environmental education is to help children find more sustainable lifestyles, those responsible for environmental education must recognize the types of learning experiences that help shape active and insightful minds.

According to the UNESCO agenda (2023) and Mokski et al. (2022), education for sustainable development (ESD) involves “*learning to make balanced decisions and integrate the long-term future of the economy and the natural environment for the benefit of all communities*”. ESD has four main focuses: (1) improving the quality and accessibility of basic education; (2) reorienting current education to address sustainability; (3) raising public awareness; and (4) providing training to business, industry, and government (Mokski et al., 2022). While environmental education focuses on preserving the natural environment and minimizing negative human impacts, sustainability education aims to teach awareness, skills, attitudes, and values that will guide and motivate people to adopt sustainable lifestyles, participate in a democratic society, and live sustainably (Sokoli & Dako, 2004). Albania is a country that is trying to strengthen a systematic approach to implementing an environmental education system.

Albania, facing sustainability challenges that are straining the global ecosystem, is aiming to incorporate sustainability education more widely into school curricula. Environmental problems in Albania have accumulated in the last decades of the 20th century due to uncontrolled use of natural resources, increased industrial and energy production with high levels of pollution, and lack of government. Appropriate policies, laws and institutions can manage and solve the problem.

As a result, the environment in Albania has deteriorated and there have been serious negative consequences for the health of the population. However, public knowledge about how to solve environmental problems is currently very limited (Sokoli & Dako, 2004). Albania's new curriculum is based on a competency-based approach. Initially, the program emphasized the need to help students develop responsibility for themselves, others, and the environment (Sokoli & Dako, 2004). Life in the 21st century requires skills to deal with unpredictable circumstances and challenges, as well as the ability to take advantage of opportunities for personal and social advancement, as well as environmental improvement (Hall, 2004).

There are six key skills identified in the curriculum, and one of these is life, work, and environment competencies, which provide useful support for personal life, society, and the environment. This competency demonstrates everyone's commitment to environmental protection and development at each educational level.

The program is organized into six areas of study, one of which is society and the environment. Through this field of study, students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the development of a democratic society. Students can develop an understanding of their environment and beyond, promote active participation and contribution to the local, national, and global communities in which they live, and participate in social and environmental issues. One of the cross-cutting themes of this field is education for sustainable development, including the economy, community services, protection of people and the natural environment, as well as the development of ecological perspectives (Sokoli & Dako, 2004).

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

1. The present article aimed to highlight the significance of having an Environmental based curricula for a healthy educational system in Albania. In many European countries, environmental education is now considered part of education for sustainable development, which includes a process-oriented, participatory and action-oriented approach to learning (Mubita et al., 2022; Kopnina, 2020; Montini & Volpe, 2019).
2. Education for sustainable development focuses on this particular relationship between people and education, and it has to be an integral part of education and sustainable development in line with the Global Green Agenda 2030. There is a need to adopt educational methods that allow Albanians to address environmental issues in a participatory and democratic way, both in formal and informal education.

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