

Evaluation of the Place of Nature and Environment in Educational Life in Accordance with the Opinions of Teachers

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Abstract: Since the aim of the study is to evaluate the place of nature and the environment in the educational life in detail in accordance with the opinions of teachers, a qualitative case study pattern was used. The study group of the study consists of 40 teachers working in public schools in a province of Turkey during the 2021-2022 academic year. The data of the study were collected by interview method. The interview data were analyzed using content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods. According to these results obtained from the research, the teachers stated that the experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment will increase the students' learning by doing and experiencing the most, develop high-level thinking skills, concretize their learning, increase the adaptation of the students to the society and the social environment, and protect the students from possible negative interactions caused by technology. The results obtained from the research, teachers said that there should be a course in nature and environmental education programs, that the activities in nature and environmental education programs cannot be fully implemented due to seasonal and geographical locations, that teachers neglect or overlook the activities related to nature and environment in the education programs due to the anxiety of preparing the students for the exam, but that flexibility should be provided to the teachers in the application of such subjects in the education programs. Other results obtained from the research, it is possible to say that the activities that teachers recommend as activities related to nature and the environment in their curriculum include learning by doing and experiencing, require practical and practical skills, consist of activities to develop students' problem-solving skills, and encourage cooperative learning.

Keywords: Nature, environment, teacher, educational life

Introduction

Starting from the earliest ages, children can perform much faster and more active learning in an environment where they can see, touch, hear, therefore they can use their senses, wonder, observe and test (Erentay & Erdoğan, 2009). Environments outside the classroom, such as nature and the environment, offer unmissable opportunities for individuals to learn by doing and experiencing. Considering that nature and the environment are indispensable parts of educational environments, which contribute greatly to the development of problem solving and high-level thinking skills in individuals, it is necessary to have an awareness of using formal and non-formal education as an

educational environment at all levels in a much more comprehensive and effective way. When the literature on the subject was examined, studies that examine the awareness that nature and environmental education will bring to students from various angles were also found (Erten, 2012; Stocklmayer & Gilbert, 2003).

There is no doubt that teachers have great duties in transferring and applying this awareness to societies. This study is considered important as it will enable teachers to increase the frequency of use of nature and environment as a direct educational environment like a classroom, it will create awareness about the subject in people and enable the adequacy of the activities related to nature and environment included in the curriculum so far on this matter. In addition, the results of the research are expected to provide findings on what activities can be done by teachers to use nature and the environment directly as part of education and to be a source for education stakeholders and related literature on the subject. The aim of the study is to evaluate the place of nature and environment in educational life in line with the opinions of teachers. For this purpose, the answers to the following questions were sought:

- Q.1) How do experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment affect the development of students? Could you explain?
- Q.2) Do you find the activities related to nature and environment in the curriculum related to your field sufficient? Could you explain?
- Q.3) What kind of activities do you recommend to be included in the educational programs related to nature and the environment as part of the education?

Method

Since the aim of the study is to evaluate the place of nature and the environment in the educational life in detail in accordance with the opinions of teachers, a qualitative case study pattern was used. Qualitative studies provide in-depth information about psychological measurements and social events (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2010). Case study is a methodological approach that involves an in-depth study of that system using multiple data collection to systematically collect information about how a limited system functions and works (Chmiliar, 2010). Merriam (2013) defines case study as an in-depth description and study of a limited system.

Study Group

The study group of the study consists of 40 teachers working in public schools in a province of Turkey during the 2021-2022 academic year. Easily accessible sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine the study group. The necessary permits have been obtained from the provincial directorate of national education in order to contact the study group.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The data of the study were collected by interview method. Interviewing is used to learn about behaviors, emotions that cannot be observed directly, or how people describe the world around them (October, 2003; Merriam, 2013). A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. During the preparation of the semi-structured interview form, expert opinions were consulted and the final form was given in accordance with the opinions and suggestions received from them. Then, face-to-face interviews lasting an average of 15 minutes were conducted with teachers who voluntarily wanted to support the study. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, a confirmatory analysis was conducted by two experts. As a result of the analysis, approval was obtained regarding the consistency and coherence of the relationships between the research data, findings and interpretations. The interview data were analyzed using content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods. The basic process of content analysis is to combine similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by arranging them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Results

Under this heading, in this study, in which teachers' views on the place of nature and environment in educational life are evaluated, the answers given by the teachers to the research questions are presented and interpreted in the form of tables.

Distribution of the opinions of the academicians on the question "Q.1) How do experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment affect the development of students? Could you explain?"

According to Table 1, the teachers stated that they would increase their learning by doing and experiencing the most (f:18) regarding the question of how the experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment affect the cognitive, psychomotor and emotional development of students. Afterwards, the teachers, respectively, stated that the experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment will develop students' high-level thinking skills (f:12), concretize learning (f:8), increase their adaptation to society and the social environment (f:8), and keep students away from possible negative effects that may be caused by technology (f:7). In addition, teachers have stated that nature and the environment will accelerate the psychomotor development of the child (f:5), enrich the child's perspective (f:4), positively affect mental health (f:3) and improve empathy skills in children. According to these results obtained from the research, the teachers stated that the experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment will increase the students' learning by doing and experiencing the most, develop high-level thinking skills, concretize their learning, increase the adaptation of the students to the society and the social environment, and protect the students from possible negative interactions caused by technology. In addition, they stated that the experiences learned submerged in nature and the environment will accelerate the psychomotor development of the students, enrich their perspectives, positively affect their mental health and improve their empathy skills. It is possible to say that the experiences learned in harmony with nature and the environment will

provide more permanent learning for students, support their development processes in every aspect, and keep them away from possible negative situations that may arise from technology in this process.

Table 1. The Distribution of the Answers given by the Teachers to the Question of How the Experiences learned submerged in Nature and the Environment affect the Development of Students

	<i>f</i>
Increases learning by doing and experiencing	18
Develops high-level thinking skills	12
Concretizes learning	8
Improves adaptation to society and the social environment	8
It keeps students away from possible negative effects that may be caused by technology	7
It accelerates their psychomotor development	5
Enriches the child's perspective	4
Positively affects mental health	3
Improves empathy skills	2
Total	67

Distribution of teachers' views on the question "Q.2) Do you find the activities related to nature and environment in the curriculum related to your field sufficient? Could you explain?"

According to Table 2, the teachers stated that they did not find the activities included in the nature and environmental education programs sufficient (f:26). They stated that the reasons for this are that there should be a course on its own called nature and environmental activities in education programs. (f: 10), then they could not include such activities sufficiently due to seasonal and geographical conditions (f: 10), they could not include such activities due to preparing students for the exam. (f:5) and teachers should be given flexibility to apply in such matters in education programs (f:3). An important part of the teachers also stated that they found the activities related to nature and environment in the education programs partially sufficient (f:8). As the reasons for this, they stated that they did not practice such activities enough. In addition, some of the teachers participating in the study also stated that they found the activities related to nature and the environment included in the educational programs sufficient (f:6). As the reasons for this, they expressed their opinions as follows: I like nature and the environment very much, so I include such activities as much as I can in my lessons (f:4) and I can include these lessons as much as possible due to my field. (f:2). According to these results obtained from the research, teachers said that there should be a course in nature and environmental education programs, that the activities in nature and environmental education programs cannot be fully implemented due to seasonal and geographical locations, that teachers neglect or overlook the activities related to nature and environment in the education programs due to the anxiety of preparing the students for the exam, but that flexibility should be provided to the teachers in the application of such subjects in the education programs.

Table 2. Distribution of the Answers given by the Teachers to the Question do you find the Activities related to Nature and the Environment in the Education Programs related to your Field Sufficient?

	<i>f</i>
I don't find sufficient	26
There should be a course called nature and environmental activities in educational programs	10
Due to seasonal and geographical conditions, I cannot include such activities sufficiently	8
I cannot include such activities as I spend my time preparing students for the exam	5
Teachers should be given flexibility to practice in such subjects in educational programs	3
I find it partially sufficient	8
I do not fully implement it	8
I find it sufficient	6
Since I love nature and the environment very much, I include them as much as I can	4
Due to my field, I include these lessons as much as possible	2

Distribution of teachers' views on the question "Q.3) "Can you explain what kind of activities you would recommend to be included in education programs about nature and environment as a part of education?"

According to Table 3, teachers stated that as a part of education, tree planting activities can be (f:24) included the most in education programs related to nature and the environment.

Table 3. Distribution of Answers to the Question, "Can you explain what Kind of Activities you would recommend to be included in Nature and Environmental Education Programs as a Part of Education?"

	<i>f</i>
Planting trees	24
Nature walks	15
Environmental cleanliness and regulation	8
Historical and cultural excursions	8
Recycling and zero waste	6
Observing weather forecasts	4
Creating a hobby garden	4
Construction of shelters for stray animals	3
Outdoor book reading activities	3
On-site examination of plant and animal species	2
Camps intertwined with nature can be organized	1
Shadow lengths depending on the time	1
Vegetable and fruit growing activities	1
Tree irrigation activities	1

The teachers stated (respectively, that environmental topics like nature and environmental activities such as nature walks (f:15), environmental cleaning and organization (f:8), historical and cultural trips (f:8) and recycling and zero waste (f:6) could be included in the education programs about nature and environment. In addition, on the same subject, teachers stated that activities such as observing the weather forecasts (f: 4), creating a hobby garden (f: 4), building a shelter for stray animals (f: 3), reading books outdoors (f: 3), examining plant and animal species on the spot (f: 4). f:2), organizing camps in nature (f: 1), shadow lengths according to the time(f: 1), vegetable and fruit growing activities (f: 1) and tree irrigation activities (f: 1) can be included. In line with these results obtained from the research, it is possible to say that the activities that teachers recommend as activities related to nature and the environment in their curriculum include learning by doing and experiencing, require practical and practical skills, consist of activities to develop students' problem-solving skills, and encourage cooperative learning. In accordance with these results obtained from the research, the following recommendations can be included.

- It may be useful to include a course called nature and environmental activities in the educational programs.
- Guidebooks describing the activity practices that teachers can include in their nature and environment related lessons can be prepared and distributed.
- In particular, in order to keep students away from the stress of the exam, more attention can be paid to the implementation of activities related to nature and the environment during the exam years.
- The inclusion of applications that give teachers the opportunity to make flexibility in educational programs for implementing activities related to nature and the environment can make the process richer.

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