Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing consensus that environmental education should be orientated around the idea of “sustainable development”. Sustainable development refers to the conservation, protection and regeneration of resources over an indefinite period of time. Central to sustainability is the idea that today decisions affect the future of human health and well-being, the environment and the economy. The concept of sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. Without environmental sustainability it is impossible to achieve sustainable development.

Environmental education should provide experiences of problem-solving, decision-making and participation, with considerations based on ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and ethical aspects. Pressing global realities demand that we foster through education - the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future.

The purpose of this article is to explore the importance of education for the achievement of sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development, environment, environmental education.
1. Introduction

In the present, the growing threat on the sustainability of natural resources and ecosystems on earth makes it necessary to deal with the environmental education process with a new point of view [1].

1.1. Sustainable development

Sustainability can also be a conservative concept if the aim is to sustain a particular point in time – a point in the past where humans lived in ‘balance’ with ‘nature’. It is here that the underpinning assumptions of ecological sciences may play a role in the absence of creativity [2].

The concept of sustainable development emerged as a response to a growing concern about human society’s impact on the natural environment. The concept of sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [3, 4]. According to the Brundtland Report, the problems facing the planet are twofold. First there are those resulting from the failure of the processes of economic development—for example, the increasing numbers of hungry people, rising levels of illiteracy, lack of safe and sound homes, shortage of fuel and the increasing gap between rich and poor. Second there are those due to the failure to manage the physical environment, resulting in desertification, deforestation, acid rain, global warming, ozone depletion and pollution. The Brundtland Report’s identification of these two sets of problems is interesting as it leads to a question about why these particular problems and not others should form the basis of the sustainable development policy process [5].

1.2. Environmental education

It is well known that education and training activities are important to find long-lasting solutions to environmental problems. The most effective method to be adopted to solve these problems is to raise awareness of environmental issues [6].

Environmental education is a new way of learning about human relations with the environment. The object of environmental education is focused on the relationship and impact of humanity on the environment. It is the type of education stressing an integrated way of structuring human nature and natural and physical resources. This education aims to create self-confident, responsible and environmentally conscious people [7].

The importance of environmental awareness, environmental sensitivity and environmental consciousness is indisputable for healthy human-nature relationships. The social roots of the coming global ecological crisis lie largely in the very structures of the present awareness of society for environment and values inherent in the way they function [8]. It is a necessity to inform individuals about environmental issues and raise ecological awareness among them in such way to ensure behavioral changes. The purpose of environmental education and training is to provide individuals with the means and ways to effectively, responsibly protect the environment [9].

The role of education in conservation and in addressing the rapidly increasing environmental problems, while improving the environment, is well-known today.

Environmental education needs a generally accepted definition, since there are different definitions and interpretations. A systematic approach to education on environmental needs must contain the following:

- Environmental education must be comprehensive,
- It must include the inter-relations of parts and elements of natural life and global structure, and
- The problems and causes of pollution must be approached from the point of view of the aforementioned relations [7].

Environmental education could be recognised as developing from a “natural science” and “earth education” base with some reflection of socially oriented issues, including regional planning and inner-city regeneration, towards a holistic and integrated approach to the environment as implied through the concept of environmental, social and economic sustainability [10].
Environmental education is a field that has undergone permanent construction and struggle. The environmental education field is the ripe target of numerous discourses inspired by different ways of looking at the environmental problem; these discourses respond to the various viewpoints with suitable pedagogic proposals [11].

1.3. Sustainable development and environmental education

The importance of education for achieving sustainable development was recognised in Agenda 21 following consultation with the international environmental education movement. Major influences on the environmental education era had been the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the Belgrade Charter arising from an international workshop on environmental education in 1975, the Declaration arising from the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education held in Tbilisi, 1977 and the World Conservation Strategy. These high level meetings and policy statements signified the increasing importance of environmental education on the political agenda at international and national levels. They also brought forward the theme of sustainable development [10].

Education, as a mean for sustainable development, covers formal and non-formal education, local civil society, the media and the workplace. Each country’s capacity to move towards sustainable human development depends on the existence of skilled human resources in the scientific, technical and Professional fields that are needed for addressing complex environmental, resource and development issues [12].

1.4. What role does education play in sustainable development?

Environmental education developed from the concern that human development was having profoundly damaging effects on the natural environment and its primary aim is the protection and conservation of the environment including natural habitats and ecosystems. Development education’s primary concern is the reduction of poverty, the promotion of social justice and the improvement of quality of life for people. It addresses basic human needs and links local and global actions. Education for sustainable development’s primary concern is the improvement of the quality of life for people without damaging the environment. Good quality education is an essential tool for achieving a more sustainable world. This was emphasized at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 where the reorientation of current education systems was outlined as key to sustainable development [3].

The Summit broadened the understanding of sustainable development and strengthened it by focusing on the important linkages that exist between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources. An important achievement of the Summit was that governments agreed to and reaffirmed a wide range of concrete commitments and targets for action to achieve more effective implementation of sustainable development objectives than hitherto [13].

Educating for a Sustainable Future, a program prepared by UNESCO, postulates that economic development forms the basis of human development by recognizing that “sustainable” economy is linked closely to conservation of natural resources and the equitable sharing of resources. Thus, environmental education (EE) becomes an important tool in the cause of sustainable development. For UNESCO, ESD (Education for sustainable development) is more than acquiring knowledge and understanding issues; it is also about developing skills, values and perspectives [14].

Education for sustainable development promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, understanding, values and actions required to create a sustainable world, which ensures environmental protection and conservation, promotes social equity and encourages economic sustainability. The concept of Education for sustainable development developed largely from environmental education, which has sought to develop the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviors in people to care for their environment. The aim of Education for sustainable development is to enable people to make decisions and carry out actions to improve our quality of life without compromising the planet. It also aims to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects and levels of learning [3].

Environmental education, can be identified developing individual environmental awareness, gaining sensible, positive, consistent change to environment, protecting historical, natural and cultural heritage, providing active attendance and taking charge in solving problems. So, the main subject is
awakening society in a sustainable way. When environmental awareness is dealt in this context, environmental education arises importantly. The question is which grade this education should be started. The most important answer of this question is education of human as of little ages. Therefore, the first step is family in this subject. The second is school and environment [15]. Environmental education should be given to the man in the education process and to be started in the pre-school education period continuing in the following stages until the end of his university education life. Even it should be continued in his whole life apart from the school [16].

2. Conclusions

At the present time, environmental awareness accepts living in a healthy environment as one of the fundamental human rights. That is possible just through a quality education. It is indisputable that environmental problems will become more serious in 21st century unless environmental education and awareness is provided to the every segment of the society, beginning with the individual, and necessary measurements are taken. Environmental Education is a way of helping individuals and societies to resolve fundamental issues relating to the current and future use of the world’s resources. However, simply raising awareness of these issues is insufficient to bring about change. Environmental education is an important component of an effective policy framework for protecting and managing the environment. Environmental Education must strongly promote the need for personal initiatives and social participation to achieve sustainability.

References