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An Implementation To Raise Environmental Awareness Of Elementary Education Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of environmental education practices on elementary education students' awareness of the environment and the problems in their environment. The participant students were selected via criteria sampling method and the data were collected by means of open ended questions before and after the implementation. Descriptive and content analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that, after the implementation, there has been an increase in the number of students who mention the problems, the causes of the problems in their environment and propose solutions for these problems. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of students who volunteer to take part in environmental activities within the school or out of the school.

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1. Main text

In 21st century, there has been a significant increase in the amount of both regional and global environmental problems. These worrying changes around us not only bring the precautions to be taken for these problems into the forefront but also enhance the importance of environmental education (Ünal ve Dımişki, 1999). Therefore, recent studies have been focusing on improving the quality of environmental education (Tarnı and other., 2009; Erdoğan 2011). The fact that environmental education starting at elementary education level will raise environmental awareness of today's children but individuals of the future has gained more importance. During recent years in our country, many studies have been conducted to search environmental education programmes (Erten, 2003), the efficiency of teachers in environmental education (Kahyaoglu and other., 2008) and.

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environmental education methods (Şimşekli, 2010). Very few of these studies involve environmental education implementations. It is possible to raise environmental awareness of elementary level students only via environmental education implementations. The implementations can focus on a local environmental problem to catch their attention or their attention can be drawn on more abstract global environmental problems. In this study, the primary school was preferred for the environmental implementations because of the fact that the school is located by the lake and students' parents live on fishing, agriculture and tourism. For this reason, the practices focused on preserving water resources that had an important role in the lives of those children, water pollution problem and its effects. In addition, the practices dealt with solid waste, air pollution and global warming and the aim was to see the effects of these implementations on students' environmental awareness.

2. Method

This is a qualitative study the purpose of which was to search the effects of environmental education practices on students' environmental awareness. The participant students were selected via criteria sampling method (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 1999). This research was conducted at İnallar Primary School located by Uluabat Lake with 30 6th graders during 2009-2010 academic year. For the implementations, the students were divided into groups of five. The implementations were scheduled to be two hours a week for two weeks and 12 teacher candidates studying their 4th years at Uludag university Faculty of Education Science Education Department were involved in the study. The teacher candidates were informed before the practices and each week 6 of them assisted the implementation. During the first week, the importance of water resources, preserving them, water pollution and its effects were studied and the samples of lake water were examined in macroscopic and microscopic conditions, It was emphasized that water is a habitat for many living things and for the survival of these living things it is essential to preserve water habitats. Next, some kinds of things such as oil, tomato sauce, salt, detergent, pieces of paper were added to lake water to discuss the pollutants that pollute water (Şimşekli, 2010). It was also discussed that the pollutants in the soil and the air also pollute water. During the second week, the greenhouse effect was demonstrated with an experiment and the increase in greenhouse effect and its causes were discussed (Yeşil kutu). The data were collected by means of open ended questions before and after the implementations. Descriptive and content analysis were used to analyze the students' responses to the open-ended questions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 1999). The views of the students were analysed and shown in tables.

3. Findings and Discussion

The aim of this research was to study the change in students' environmental awareness with the analysis of students' responses to open-ended questions before and after the implementations. It was seen that the students gave more than one answer to the open-ended questions and all the responses were listed and turned into numeric data and then shown in tables. The students' responses to the question "What are the environmental problems in your region?" before and after the implementations were listed and shown in Table 1. When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that before the implementation the students only mentioned lake pollution and waste problem, but after the implementation they mentioned all of the four environmental problems. What attracts attention in this table is the numeric changes between the responses before and after the implementation. Before the implementation, 63.33% of the students mentioned water pollution, but after the implementation it was 90%; before the implementation 26.66% of the students mentioned waste problem, but after the implementation it was 53.33%. In addition, after the implementation, 30% of the students touched upon global warming and 20% of them touched on soil pollution. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Aguirre-Bielschowsky and his friends (2012).

Table 1. The responses of the students to the question "What are the environmental problems in your region?"

Student responses	Pre-implementation		Post-implementation	
	n	%	n	%
Lake Pollution	19	63.33	27	90
Waste Problem	8	26.66	16	53.33
Global warming	-		9	30
Soil pollution	-		6	20

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