



*Research Paper*

## The status of environmental education in preschool from the perspective of Bukan city educators

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The present study aimed to investigate the status of environmental education in preschool from the perspective of Bukan city educators. This was a qualitative study and its method was phenomenological. The study population included all preschool educators in Bukan city. The participants (n=11) were selected through sequential purposive sampling method. The data collection tool was semi-structured interviews. Findings show that the current status of environmental education in preschool is not appropriate. Furthermore, the participants emphasized the following points: cognitive, emotional and practical domains with regard to the goals of environmental education, adaptation to the developmental period of preschool children and observing the principles governing the selection and organization of content in terms of content, interactive, active, indirect and technological methods with regard to teaching-learning methods, observational, direct and cognitive methods in terms of assessment methods, observing the principle of coordination with emotional needs and designing a naturalistic educational space in terms of educational space, and paying attention to the diversity and appropriateness of resources and tools in terms of learning resources and tools. Generally, this study indicates that a novel comprehensive scientific approach should be used in all its dimensions in order to improve environmental education in preschool.

**Keywords:** *Environmental education, Preschool, Preschool children, Bukan city.*

## **Introduction**

The world has reached a point where environmentalists call it a state of "excessive pressure and collapse" (Mokhtari, Abdollahi and Sadeghi, 2014); that is, the ecology of nature is gradually being destroyed, and finally the environment of our planet is under severe pressure from various directions. Undoubtedly, one of the most important strategies to protect the environment and prevent its destruction and pollution is to raise individual's awareness and insight through educational activities (Oglu, Sahin and Baslar, 2013). As such, environmental education aims to raise individual's environmental awareness to preserve the environment on a local, regional and global scale. It also creates and promotes individual's sensitivity to events and changes in nature (Abedi, Friendpour and Asadipour, 2018).

In order to implement environmental education, human groups must first be taught. Beddoe, Costanza, Farley, Garza, Kent, Kubiszewski & Woodward (2009) refer to school teachings. Schools are social institutions where students learn in the heart of the community, and consequently, increase their ability to experience directly in the future (Saylan & Blumstein, 2011). Proper planning and environmental education prepares students to enter society, make the right decisions for the environment, and provide a strategy for awareness, knowledge and skills needed to understand and recognize the importance of nature (Shobayri, 2016). Environmental education has always been a hot topic in all societies. Research shows that not only the sense of responsibility created and environmental education in childhood guide social and environmental behavior in adolescence and adulthood, but also they are the essential prerequisites of desirable or undesirable environmental behaviors, namely environmental problems (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000). The environmental education curriculum has received a great deal of attention since the early 1960s, and has undergone a child-centric transformation. This new trend has caused the content of lessons and learning materials to be based on the child environment (Karimi, Kian & Askari, 2017). Nonetheless, the environmental education curriculum in Iran faces considerable doubts and deficiencies. The study of textbooks in Iran indicates the lack of a coherent program and the lack of balanced attention to environmental concepts. Most of the weaknesses can be attributed to the inadequacy and inefficiency of the existing curriculum in the field of environment, failure to address the importance of environmental issues and educating generations regarding these issues. In addition, there is a general dissatisfaction with the current status of the curriculum elements, including objectives, content, teaching methods, learning activities, learning space and assessment (Karimi et al., 2017).

Yaghoubi and Mansoori (2010); Salehi, Pazokinejad and Emamgholi (2014); Izadi (2015); Sadat nejad (2015); Karimi et al. (2017), and Abedi et al. (2018) examined the role of environmental education at different stages and revealed its positive and significant effects on people's attitudes toward the environment. Research in other countries also indicate the positive effects of environment on people's attitudes and behaviors. For example, Williams (2011), Demrell, Howe, and Milner-Guland (2013) and Crawford, Luke, and Van Pellet (2015) showed that increased participation in environmental-based nature education leads to superior ecological behavior, and promotes through environmental knowledge and communication with nature.

The foundations of knowledge, skills and attitudes are formed from the preschool period and their importance is crystal clear (Mirdamadi, Bagheri Varkaneh and Ismaili, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to address any educational transformation and innovation from the early years of childhood and to plan for childhood and beyond on a strong foundation. Given that many environmental threats, destructions and pollutions result from human behavior, these issues can be reduced only if human behavior changes, which is possible through awareness and knowledge.

## **Methodology**

This is a qualitative phenomenological study, which means the meaning of a phenomenon is discovered from the perspective of relevant informants. Furthermore, Bukan preschool educators have gained life experiences regarding the state of environmental education in preschool children. The population of this study included all preschool teachers in Bukan because they were accessible and that they had the lived experiences that could help us examine the status of environmental education in preschool. The participants were selected by purposive sampling until reaching theoretical saturation with 11 individuals. The data collection tool was semi-structured interviews. Interpretive analysis was used to analyze the data through open, axial and selective coding.

## **Results**

The results of analyzing the interviews on the current status of environmental education in preschool are classified in the selective code of negligence of the Education Office regarding environmental education in preschool and the central code of unfavorable environmental education in preschool. Accordingly, the current status of environmental education is not appropriate in preschool educators' opinion. "The current status is not suitable for environmental education," said one interviewee. Another

interviewee said: "I think education should pay special attention to these centers so that the situation becomes favorable for children and educators." "The current status of environmental education is not nice," said another interviewee.

## Discussion and conclusion

The interview findings on the current status of environmental education in preschool were obtained in the selective code of negligence of the Education Office regarding environmental education. These results are consistent with the research of Sadat Nejad (2015) as he reported that students' knowledge about general and specific environmental issues is low.

## Research suggestions

1. Planners and policy makers in the field of education should take environmental education seriously in all educational levels, especially in the preschool period, 2. Educators should encourage children to take part in practical environmental education activities (conducting experiments, role-playing, field trips, etc.). 3. Educators should use active methods to teach children environmental concepts and issues.

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