

CHARTING A PATH FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: LEGISLATIVE AND CURRICULAR FRAMEWORKS IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The concept of literacy goes beyond traditional reading and writing skills, referring to the individual's ability to function effectively in a variety of environments and communicative situations. In the modern era, digital technology has expanded the forms of literacy, such as scientific, digital and environmental, necessary to fulfil educational and social needs. Environmental Education is considered key to the development of Environmental Literacy, aiming to inform and raise awareness about sustainable development and sustainability. Despite the institutional steps that have been taken, Environmental Education in Greece has not been established as an independent subject, but functions mainly as an interdisciplinary activity. Its application remains optional, depending to a large extent on the decisions of the teachers and the social conditions of their environment. The study highlights gaps in environmental curriculum development, highlighting the need for better coordination and support to make environmental education more effective and integrated into school life. It also focuses on the need to reform Environmental Education to keep pace with international practices and concepts of sustainable development. It analyzes the implementation of the legislative documents and curricula, and demonstrates that Environmental Education remains mainly voluntary, resulting in the reduced participation of teachers in programs. It concludes about the importance of teacher training and the need to institutionalize the implementation of environmental programs in the school curriculum.

Keywords: Introduction Environmental Education; Environmental Literacy; Curricula; Legislation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The "New School", aims to form a new environmental culture by building knowledge, cultivating skills for the proper use of natural resources in favor of a sustainable society based on the well-being of the individual. It is autonomous, interdisciplinary and provides quality education, which activates students without discrimination. Taking into account the modern international practices for "greening", the curriculums, but also the empirical data of curriculums for sustainability, it emerges the fact that the basic topics are common and are fragmented into the same thematic units but including a different difficulty index for each class. Something that contradicts the current image that dominates the educational community. Through the bibliographic study it is pointed out that although since the 1990s (Law 1892/1990), Environmental Education (EE) was established as an activity in Primary Education schools, Environmental Coordinators were placed in the local Directorates and EECs (Environmental Education Centres) were established, there is

a decrease in interest from teachers for development of environmental programs. Hence the gradual abolition of the Institution of Environmental Education Officers, and the merger, abolition or understaffing of some EECs.

The training of teachers was given priority to achieve the goal. However, the voluntary basis of implementation of programs and the non-institutionalization of the obligation to prepare them, brought negative results, since many few teachers carried out programs or actions focused on the creation of a "sustainable school".

The need for this study stems from the critical importance of environmental literacy in shaping a sustainable society. Analyzing historical documents provides insight into how EE has evolved over time in Greece, revealing how pedagogical approaches have changed, and how governmental policies have either supported or hindered the integration of environmental topics into curricula. By examining the effectiveness of laws and circulars concerning EE the degree to which these legal frameworks promote environmental literacy, is revealed. It should be noted that the term "environmental literacy", which concerns the appreciation and understanding of ecosystems as well as their importance, has been directly integrated into the curricula of Primary Schools in Greece since 2003. This study serves to propose effective measures and necessary reforms for a more robust and institutionalized approach to environmental literacy that aligns with global practices surrounding sustainability and education.

Purpose of research

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of existing laws and circulars in promoting environmental literacy and to explore "how" the curricula educate students in sustainability. Additionally, through the historical overview, any omissions or omissions in the laws will be highlighted, in order to propose improvements to strengthen environmental literacy.

Research Tool

To scientifically support the research, content analysis was used by examining existing documents, such as laws, circulars and syllabuses, in order to assess "how" they promote environmental literacy in Primary Education.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this particular study, "ex post facto research" was used, the so-called retrospective research. This is an archival research with a sample of laws, and curriculums, where the researcher cannot influence the results of the research, since they have already come out, but can determine through the review of the material, mechanisms could be established afterwards evaluation of the new curricula with the aim of making corrections to the existing ones and forming the core for their readjustment, the writing of new ones, or even their abolition if it brings regression to the educational system.

In addition, the method of qualitative content analysis was applied to the categories formed. Initially, an analysis was performed of the contents of the circulars and detailed programs based on chronological order with reference each time to the corresponding Official Gazette, Presidential Decree and description of the subject of the document. Subsequently, the set of data collected was sorted in alphabetical order in grouped tables. In this way, the evolution of EE was charted and its course over the years was established.

Necessity of research

The specific opinion was drawn up by the writer's need to capture through the bibliography the manifestations of EE and to emphasize the importance of teaching it as a separate course with an independent textbook. An innovation for the benefit of the educational community.

Review of Analytics Programs

The concept of the curricula in the Greek language corresponds to the term curriculum, which means a cycle in a stage from the Latin word “currere”, which means to run (Hatzigeorgiou, 2012). The first curricula were traditional. It consisted of tables, lists of summary diagrams, as well as the prescribed teaching hours. They were binding and a carrier of knowledge with an attachment to detail and their faithful observance throughout the year.

The objectives were specific and did not meet the real needs of the students. They focused on the outcome rather than the learning process. Curricula, on the other hand, had clear goals, encouraged alternative teaching methods, checked whether the teaching met the needs of students, and had liberal ideas. There were also the closed type curricula, of course, which had a traditional character, attached to old methods and means of teaching.

Starting the research from the first curricula, it was extracted that they were constituted by the "Instructions" of Petridis, that did not have the known legal form (Decree), but was included in the book of Inspector D.G. Petridis, "Elementary practical instructions for teachers in the Municipal Schools in Athens, 1881". The subjects taught about the environment, among others, were elementary Geography and more precisely the Geography of Greece and the Greek countries, elementary zoology, mineralogy, elementary botany, elementary physics and the necessary practical instructions for agriculture and arboriculture (Curriculum 2017/28-2-1881). The present syllabus referred to four-grade “boys and girls” schools. It should be noted that more emphasis was placed on discipline, uniformity in programs and teaching methods.

In 1894, by royal decree of 20/11, the first official curriculum for the primary school was issued, which was also accompanied by the timetable, which was communicated to the teachers and had to be followed faithfully. The program was written by Papamarkou (1890).

That curriculum was modified again in 1899 and by addition with the passage of Law B'MMΘ'/1895 in article 10, Natural History with application to Agriculture, Industry, Animal Husbandry and Hygiene was also taught.

In 1911, a Central Supervisory Board of Public Education was established by law and a five-member board was instituted with the aim of reforming the curricula. In 1913 the royal decree was published, which came into effect a year later. With this program, more emphasis was placed on practical and technical courses, while the hours of teaching the Greek language were minimized. The hours devoted to the course of Geography and National Knowledge occupied a percentage of 8.1%, however, they were not taught in all primary school classes, while the course of Natural History and Natural Science is taught in 4th, 5th and 6th grade.

The 1913 syllabus was in effect until 1959, nearly fifty years. During this time attempts were made to change and readjust the program. In 1951, an effort began that led to the drawing up of a curriculum by the “Central Advisory Council”, for the courses of Patriotism and Geography (Ministry of Education curriculum/2499/12-4-1951). Although the detailed program took its legal form (Government Gazette, volume B'14/30-1-1957), it was never implemented (Petridis, 1966). A similar work on its modification was started in 1966, but due to its abolition from the doctoral status, it was not completed (Bouzakis, 1999).

After the cancellation of the dictatorship, the Center for Educational Studies and Training was founded. A new law on Education was passed and the curriculum of 1977 was drawn up (P.D.1034/4-11-1977), which was valid until 1982.

On the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Central Supervisory Board of Public Education, EE was introduced in Secondary Education, not as a new subject but as an optional educational innovation. In 1982 the Study of the Environment was taught in the 1st and 2nd grade and aimed at the active participation of the students, the cultivation of cooperation skills, with the aim of introducing the children to the broad reality (P.D.583/31-08-1982).

In 1983 with Official Gazette 168/A/ P.D. 449/18-11-83, even though it became the trigger for training a new Curriculum, however because it was not based on the training of teachers for teaching new material, it was deemed ineffective and was abandoned. With PD 528/ November 26, 1984, amendments were made to Environmental Studies for 1st and 2nd grades and emphasis was placed on student-centered teaching, focused on the interests and inclinations of the students. Law 1566/1985 was complementary and stated that it was necessary for the student to acquire moods, attitudes towards the physical and social environment and to have an interdependence relationship in its dynamic structure. There was also mention on the student's detachment from the immediate environment and the need to transcend the wider space, outside the classroom, was emphasized, so that he could make comparisons. Finally, in addition to the basic lesson framework, special modules were introduced, where the teacher could dedicate them to the exploration of the natural environment with the result that the student acquired scientific interests.

With the law 1892/90 and the related circulars, the concept of the environment in EE was dealt within the holistic dimension and included the following aspects: Natural, Artificial/structured, Socio-Economic and Historical environment. For this reason, each topic/problem was studied interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. With the Official Gazette 9/A/ 18-01-1996, amendments and adjustments were made to the Curricula, after their evaluation. It was the first year that the English Language course was introduced in Primary Education and there was an Evaluation-Reformation of the APs in terms of their objectives, indicative teaching methods.

In 2001, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) drew up a Study Guide for primary school, which was put into practice on a pilot basis. This specific action was awarded by EPEAEK I & II, which at the community level was financed by the 3rd Community Support Framework. This was how the first Cross-curricular Unified Curriculum Frameworks (CUCF) were written. From the same fund the teachers were trained to the new book (Ministry of Education and Research III, 2004, 2007).

In 2003, the Pedagogical Institute elaborated the drafting of the Interdisciplinary Unified Framework of Study Programs by introducing the Interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. An attempt was performed to upgrade the quality of the education provided and to break away from the horizontal distribution of the teaching material that only concerned the taught course. To achieve interdisciplinarity, a new Innovative Action, the Flexible Zone was proposed. In this way, it was attempted through the CUCF, the Curricula, the Flexible Zone and the multi-thematic book to shield the student with its own "educational mantle", its own world view of to reach personal "wellbeing". In the same year, EE according to the CUCF belonged to the Programs of Planning and Development of Interdisciplinary Activities. It continued to be part of programs of Primary Education schools because the environment was treated with its holistic dimension and included manifestations in the political, social, historical, artificial, economic environment. For this reason, every problem that concerned it was studied interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary.

This Curriculum was valid until today. In 2021, with PD/162565/D1, the revised curricula were drawn up, which for the two years 2022-2024, are piloted in standard and experimental schools of Primary and Secondary Education in our country.

3. CIRCULAR REVIEW

An important milestone for education was the 1892/1990 law of the Ministry of Health, which introduced EE and a year later also into Primary Education. In 1991, according to this law, EE was part of the Education program and its purpose was for students to become aware of the relationship between man and the natural and social environment, to become aware of the problems related to it, to be active with related programs and to contribute to the general effort dealing with them. With the same law, article 111, par.13, the person in charge of EE was defined, who would be seconded to the Directorate of Education for three years. Its duties and responsibilities were defined.

With circular Γ2/4255/98, the connection of EE with Sustainable Development (SD). In circular Γ2/4255/99, the need to raise students' awareness as well as the redefinition of EE and its connection with Sustainability and Sustainable Development was mentioned as a first priority.

In the circular of 2005, the Ministry of Education and Culture adopts the goals of the U.N. and UNESCO-UNEP and formulates educational actions concerning "Education for sustainability". 2005 was designated as the Year for water with the title: "Earth, Blue Planet". The year 2005 was considered a milestone for school activities because then the theme of EE for sustainability was included. With the circular of 2006, the educational actions for sustainable development continued. With the 2007 circular, EE and Health Education programs could be financed by European funds and not only by the state budget. The 2008 circular combined the European year of "Innovation and Creativity" with education for Sustainability. The 2009 circular continued the Health Education and EE Program and the programs aimed at a holistic view of the Principles of Sustainable Development. With the circular of 2010, the implementation time of the programs, which are taught during school hours, changed. In grades 1, 2, 3, 4 they took place during the Flexible Zone. In grades 5 and 6 once a week.

From 2000-2009 it was observed that the circulars were similar to minimal differences. In Primary Education, programs were implemented within school hours, within the context of the flexible zone lesson. There was funding from state grant N.5274 and each teacher involved could either get up to four hours of overtime (weekly), or make up the hours.

With the revision of the 2008 Constitution, article 24 was enriched with the concept of sustainability (Parliament of the Hellenic Republic, 2010, p.38). Article 24 formalized the obligation for the state to take preventive measures in the context of sustainability.

Since 2010 there had been changes in the circulars, which coincided with the period of our country's financial crisis. In 2011, funding through a State grant was abolished with no. of protocol 118425/Γ7 on 14/10/2011. Paragraph: use this for the first paragraph in a section, or to continue after an extract. In 2012, by decision of the Deputy Minister of Education (GOVERNMENT GAZETTE 2314 B/ 10-8-2012), the institution of the Environmental Education Officer was redefined and changed. In 2013, an attempt was made to introduce experiential activities linked to sustainable development and the term "sustainable school" appeared.

By circular in 2014, the ERASMUS + and e-twinning programs were included. The circular of 2015, in paragraph 1.8. considered that in the context of strengthening the environmental, social and political literacy of students and making use of the accumulated experience of the thematic

years for Education for Sustainability, it was recommended to give priority to the development of programs on immigration, refugee and asylum issues given the swelling of the refugee and the need to sensitize students.

In 2016, the topic of the goals of the 2030 agenda was promoted and the 17 goals of the Sustainable Development of the fifteen years until 2030 were numbered for the first time in the annex of the circular. In 2017, the goals of the 2030 agenda were repeated.

With the circular of 2018 and GOVERNMENT GAZETTE102A/12-6-2018), article 52, the coordinators of Environmental Education, Health Education, Cultural Matters and the EECs were abolished. They were replaced by the people in charge of school activities, one in each prefecture, while those in charge of Environmental Education, Health Education, and Cultural Affairs were retained in urban centers A'. B, C, D Athens, A, B, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Achaia and Heraklion Crete. The EECs were replaced by the ECSs (Education Centers for Sustainability) staffed by the coordinators of the educational project. The operation of ECSs transferred to the relevant Municipalities (Law 4547/2018, article 13).

With the circular of 2019 on the topic of environmental education activities, there is talk about the use of material and immaterial resources of the school for sustainability. Also one of the goals is Sustainability - Democracy.

With sub no. of protocol F.7/79511/GD4/24-6-2020, the teaching subject "Skills Workshops", which replaces the Flexible Zone in Primary Education, which was abolished in 2016, is implemented as a pilot in 218 kindergartens, primary schools, high schools. By law, e-Twinning can be implemented either independently or in addition to school activity programs.

With circular 4807/2021 article 52, the didactic unit of the Skills Workshops is mandatorily defined in the Curriculum, valid for all levels of Education.

With a circular of 2022, Education for Sustainability, which is more of a moral rule than a scientific one, is institutionalized in the New Analytical Study Programs and in issue B'2820/06.06.2022. In this Curriculum, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (abbreviated BA), are spread across the thematic fields and thematic units of all classes. There is talk of Environmental literacy and development for Sustainable Development. The Curriculum is organized based on environmental literacy in direct relation with other literacy such as social, economic, technological, and marine. In 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th grades, sustainability is taught at the local level, while in 5th and 6th grades, sustainability is taught at the local and national level.

Concepts such as sustainable development, biodiversity, geodiversity, sustainable school, ecological footprint, 17 Goals of B.A. are in the appendix of the Curriculum Guide in order to emphasize the necessity of teaching during the program hours.

Similarly, the circular for the year 2023-2024 was drawn up. At the time of writing, the new circular for the current school year 2024-2025 has not been issued.

The previous review showed that through the study of circulars and Curricula, the promotion of education for sustainable development is necessary for the creation of tomorrow's Active Citizen and citizenship.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The table below shows the development course of the Analytical Programs from 1881 to 2024.

Table 1. Development of curricula

Year	Government Gazette No	Presidential Decree/	Title/ Description
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		Ministerial Decision/ Law	
1881	There was no	There was no	Book by Inspector D.G. Petrides «Elementary Practical Instructions for Teachers in Primary Schools» In Athens, 1881.
1894	There was no	Royal Presidential Decree 20-11-1894	The first "Official Curriculum".
1895	There was no	1895 Article 10	On the distribution of the teaching of the material in full primary schools.
1913	There was no	174 /A	About the number of pupils for each to be taught.
1957	14/A	30 January	On the Analytical and Timetable of Patridognostic Courses.
1977	347 A	15 May / 1034	About the subjects taught and the Timetable of the Primary School.
1982	107 A	31 August /583	Detailed and Timetable of Grades A - B, of Primary School.
1983	168 A	PD/ 18 Nov/ 449	Same as in 1982.
1984	185 A'	PD /26 Nov/523	Modification and Completion of the Environmental Study A' – B' class.
1985	A' 167	1566/30-09-1985	Structure and Operation of the Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Education.
1990	(Government Gazette 101A/31-7-1990	1890/90	For modernization and development and other provisions.
1996	9 A	18 Jan/015	Modification of the Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Education.
1998	161 A	Jul 13, /200	Organization and Operation of Primary Schools.
2001	1366sq.B	18-10-2001	Pedagogical Design of DEPPS and ALS of HR. Interdisciplinarity and the Flexible Zone change Education and upgrade Education.
2003	303 and 304/B/2003	M.D. 21072α/ Γ2/ 13-03-2003	Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework and Curricula of Elementary-Gymnasium. The course is introduced "Environment and Education for Sustainable Development" in the compulsory curriculum of Kindergarten, Primary and High School. (Review).

2020	Government Gazette A	4692/2020	School upgrading and other provisions. Pilot Introduction of Skills Workshops in Primary and Secondary Education.
2021-2022	3567/B	04-08-2021	The Aims and Objectives of the Skills Workshops and the four thematic units in Primary School are defined. Mandatory application Elementary-Gymnasium.
2022	6712/B pii/162565/d1	23-12-2022	Ministerial decision for the implementation of the "Multiple Book". Revision of the Curricula and their pilot implementation in experimental and model schools of Primary and Secondary Education.

Table 1. Chronological Mapping of the circulars from 2003 to 2024

Circular	Description
1892/1990 Official Gazette 101A/31-7-1990	1991: Environmental Education is part of Primary Education. It is not taught as a separate course.
Circular SCH- Ministry of Education and Culture Γ2/4255/98	The concept of sustainable development is introduced.
SD Circular – ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. Γ2/4255/99	Redefining Environmental Education. Link to Sustainability and Sustainable Development.
SD Circular – ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. 105087/Γ7-5-10-2005	The topic of Environmental Education for Sustainability is included.
SD Circular - ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. Prot. No. 108800/Γ7/19-10-2006. Athens	Actions for sustainable development continue.
SD Circular - ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. Prot. No. 117302/Γ7/19-10-2007. Athens	Funding of Environmental Education programs from European resources.
SD Circular - ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. Prot. No. 150401/Γ7/20-11-2008. Athens	European Year of "Innovation and Creativity". Education for Sustainability.
SD Circular – ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. Prot. No. 81687/Γ7/9-7-2009. Athens	Holistic development of the Principles of Sustainability.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.Δ.Β.Μ.Θ. Prot. No. 119236/Γ7/24-9-2010. Athens	Changes to circulars due to financial crisis.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.Δ.Β.Μ.Θ. Prot. No. 118425/Γ7/14-10-2011. Athens	Environmental Education becomes an independent course taking the new name: "Environment and Education for Sustainable Development"
Circular SD Ministry of Education and Culture Prot. No. 163790/Γ7/31-10-2013. Athens	The term "sustainable school" is introduced.

Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. 167127/Γ7/15-10-2014. Athens	E-Twinning programs become part of school activities.
Circular SD Ministry of Education and Culture No. Prot. 178852/ΓΔ4/06-11-2015. Athens	Highlighting the topic: immigration, refugee and asylum.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. 170596/ΓΔ4/13-10-2016. Athens	Promoting the goals of the 2030 agenda.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. 188142/ΓΔ4/2-11-2017. Athens	The goals of the 2030 agenda are reiterated.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. 212004/Δ7/07-12-2018. Athens	Abolition of Environmental Education, Health Education, Cultural Issues Coordinators.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. (2019) Prot. No. 190790/Δ7/04-12-2019. Athens	E-Twinning can be taught together with programs of environmental education, health education, cultural subjects.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. 212004/Δ7/29-10-2020. Athens	Pilot application of Skills Workshops in primary schools.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. Φ.11/126281/Δ7/ 14-10-2022.	After the implementation of the programs, a supplementary circular follows the report and dissemination of the school activities.
Circular SD- ΥΠ.ΠΑΙ.Θ. Prot. No. Φ.11/122917/Δ7/ 30-10-2023. Athens	They apply as in the previous one.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

From the historical review of circulars and curricula, it is clear that EE was never a purely independent subject, but was always integrated to other subjects. As can be seen from the first curriculum, they were mainly interwoven with the courses of Folklore, Patriotism, Geography, Mineralogy, Botany and Zoology, Natural History.

It is observed that during the years of the dictatorship, the vice of censorship did not arrive since the natural environment was not considered political and thus there was no problem in the writing of the curricula nor in the writing of circulars. With Law 1892/90, EE is considered part of school programs. In fact, in the 2003 CUCF, it belongs to the Planning and Development of School Activities Programs. The name "environment" encompasses many dimensions. In the effort to protect the environment, it was considered important to study it through the dimensions of social justice and economic prosperity. Only when the environment is not used recklessly, it can bring both economic goods and balance to society. Thus the concept of sustainability, sustainability and sustainable development is widely used. EE was replaced by sustainable development. In this way, it is believed that integration helps students understand the concept of sustainability and environmental protection through various aspects of education.

Even in the ministerial decision on the Curricula (2022) which are piloted in experimental and model schools of Primary and Secondary Education, the EE it is a learning process connected to other thematic units and not an independent teaching subject.

Instead of an epilogue

In order to promote EE as an independent course, it is proposed to introduce an integrated Curriculum that will focus exclusively on issues of sustainability and environmental awareness. The first concern could be the inclusion of the EE in the timetable of all levels of education as a compulsory subject starting from Primary Education. In addition, the training of teachers in modern practices and techniques for teaching environmental subjects is of critical importance. It would be beneficial to create partnerships with environmental organizations, universities, for the continuous training of teachers.

In conclusion, the development of school programs and activities, participation in thematic networks that combine theoretical education with practical applications such as reforestation, recycling, school garden, will strengthen the active participation of students and their connection with the environment.

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