Developing Environmental Awareness Through Physical Education - Views Of Physical Education Teachers

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Abstract:

Background: Cultivating Environmental awareness is an educational challenge of prime importance. Physical Education course practiced in natural environment provides numerous alternative opportunities for Environmental Education to shape students committed to environment. The objective of this study to investigate the view of physical education teachers on the development of environmental awareness through Physical Education.

Materials and Methods: 457 physical education teachers in primary schools in rural, semi-urban and urban areas of Greece participated in the survey. A questionnaire of five subscales was formed for the purpose of this study. The normality of the data was checked by the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test. The a-Cronbach reliability test is 0.906. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between variables.

Results: The results obtained show that in accordance with PE teachers' views Physical Education contribute to the development of environmentally and socially responsible people and to the formation of values for the environment, while PE teachers consider that experiential learning displays a minimum to Environmental awareness cultivated in students through Physical Education course. In addition, the results show differences between female and male Physical Education teachers on the contribution of Physical Education to environmental education, social values and experiential learning.

Conclusion: Physical Education course display essential opportunities for the development of environmental awareness and socio-moral development.

Key Word: Physical Education, Environmental awareness, teachers, social values, experiential learning

Date of Submission: 03-10-2023 Date of Acceptance: 13-10-2023

I. Introduction

In recent decades, Environment has aroused worldwide interest, as constant evolution brings humanity into a delicate balance with natural environment¹. Economic growth in modern societies through industrial and technological progress, reckless pursuit of profit, rapid growth and the demands of modern consumer society are still present in this decade. The extensive use of current resources jeopardies the needs of future generation. Therefore, these worldwide problems demand solutions that involve not only actions but also stimulation of environmental awareness.

As demonstrated, so as to achieve environmental awareness, planned and well-structured actions are required. In this context for action, education takes the lead and empowers future citizens to succeed in a holistic, transformative, and lifelong change^{2,3}. Only through education, present and future generation will be capable of achieving a more sustainable world. The school as the main body of socialization in an ever-changing society is called to transform the needs of modern society into teaching subjects. It is called upon to make changes to curricula and teaching strategies to cultivate the necessary skills so that students can live effectively and successfully in their environment⁴.

In particular, the holistic perspective of Physical Education course aims to equip students with the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes for an active and healthy lifestyle⁵. Physical education and ecological

orientation are key components of physical cultural identity by which people are capable of leading a healthy and socially active⁶. Physical Education expedites the creation of an ideal context to promote environmental care through physical activities in natural environments with environmental protection activities^{7,8,9,10}. Physical Education practice outdoors in natural environments ought to be led by the pretension of caring for the planet in a practical and disciplined way¹¹. Establishing practitioners' environmental awareness implies awareness of the importance of knowing, experiencing, feeling, and respecting the natural environment when engaging in a physical activity in nature^{12, 13}.

As can be seen, in order to achieve environmental awareness through education, well planned and structured action are required from educators. Educators training and awareness are of high importance as they constitute agents of change.

II. Literature Review

Reviewing the existing literature, studies were found on the contribution of Physical Education to Environmental Education^{14,15}, the contribution of Environmental Education to Physical Education^{9,16,17,18,19,20}, the integration of Environmental Education issues in Physical Education curriculum to achieve sustainable educational goals²¹. Moreover, studies were carried out about the connection between Physical activity and Environmental Education¹³ and between Physical activity and sustainability^{5,10,13,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33}.

In response to the affiliation between the Physical Education and Environmental awareness, many studies have been published during the last decade. Several studies focus on the human contact with nature through physical activities outdoor leading to a better understanding of environmental problems and an increase of environmental interest^{34,35,36,37,38,39}. However, no studies were found which focus on Physical Education teachers' views on the contribution of Physical Education to environmental Awareness. The current study investigates the relationship of Physical Education and the development of Environmental Awareness through the views of Physical Education teachers. More specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Do Physical Education teachers form a positive opinion about the connection of Physical Education with environmental awareness?
- (2) Do Physical Education teachers form a positive view of the contribution of the Physical Education in the development of social values related to the environment?
- (3) Do Physical Education teachers form a positive view of the contribution of experiential learning to the development of environmental awareness?
- (4) Does the gender of the teachers function as a differentiating factor in terms of the level of the mean values of the Scales of the Teachers' Questionnaire?

III. Material And Methods

After written informed consent was obtained, a well-designed questionnaire was used to collect the data of the sample retrospectively. The questionnaire included socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, place, teaching experience, and five (5) scales. A total sample of 457 PE teachers (48% female) were included in the study. Of the 457 participants, all were teaching at primary school (for students aged 7-12 years old). The participants were from different places, from rural areas of Greece (13.3%), from semi – urban areas (18.6%) and from urban areas (68.1%). In terms of years of teaching experience, 8.5% had between 1 - 10 years of teaching experience, 19.0% had between 11 - 15 years of teaching experience, 40.3% had between 16 - 20 years of teaching experience, 12.5% had between 16 - 20 years of teaching experience, 16.6% had between 16 - 20 years of teaching experience and 3.1% had between 16 - 20 years of teaching experience (Table 1).

Table no1: Distribution of gender, age, teac experience.	ching area and teaching	N	%
Condon	Male	237	51.90%
Gender	Female	220	48.10%
	Total	457	100.00%
	30-35	11	2.40%
	36-40	14	3.10%
A	41-45	68	14.90%
Age	46-50	157	34.40%
	51-55	170	37.20%
	56-65	37	8.10%
	Total	457	100.00%
	Rural	61	13.30%
Place	Semi- urban	85	18.60%
	Urban	311	68.10%
	Total	457	100.00%
	1-10	39	8.50%
Teaching experience	11-15	87	19.00%
	16-20	184	40.30%

21-25	57	12.50%
26-30	76	16.60%
31-35	14	3.10%
Total	457	100.00%

The questionnaire used in the present survey was distributed in printed and electronic form via e-mail. It consists of 5 subscales: Q1. Information about Environmental Education (4 items), Q2. Connection of Physical Education and environment (11 items), Q3: Environmental awareness and Physical education (9 items), Q4: Social values and Physical Education (16 items) and Q5: Experiential learning, Environment and Physical Education (6 items).

The Information about Environmental Education (Q1) was used to evaluate participants' information of Environmental Education and participation in projects of Environmental Education. The Connection of Physical Education and environment scale (Q2) was used to assess participants' perception about Physical Education and environment and the converging points between them. The Environmental Awareness scale (Q3) was used to evaluate participants' perception about environmental awareness and the development of it through Physical Education. The social values scale (Q4) was used to evaluate the extent to which participants consider that social values are cultivated through Physical Education. The Experiential learning scale (Q5) was used to assess participants' perception about the impact of experiential learning in Physical Education on raising environmental awareness.

The processing of the descriptive and inductive statistic of the data was done with the help of the statistical package IBM SPSSv21 and for 95% confidence intervals (p_{value} = 0.05). The regularity check was done with the Kolmogorov Smirnoff test and showed that there is not a normal distribution (Sig.= 0,000 > 0,05). Therefore, the test of the differentiation of the mean values between variables is carried out with the non-parametric t-test of Mann – Whitney – Wilcoxon, at a level of statistical significance α =5% and the linear correlation test of the variables is carried out with the non-parametric linear correlation test and the extraction of the Spearman linear correlation coefficient index (-1, +1), at a statistical significance level of a=5%.

The Cronbach reliability test showed that there is internal consistency in the questionnaire both in the individual questions of the stakeholders and in its entirety, as shown in Table 2.

Table no2: Cronbach Reliability Test for the whole sample (F= 457 100%)	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
1. Information about Environmental Education	0,664	4
2. Connection of Physical Education and environment	0,558	11
3. Environmental awareness and Physical Education	0,835	9
4. Social values and Physical education	0,936	16
5. Experiential learning, Environment and Physical Education	0,663	6
Total	0,906	46

Factor analysis of key components for the correlations of the correlations of the 46 variable questions of the questionnaire was performed (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index = 0.886 > 0.007). Table 3 presents the results of the "Rotated Component Matrix" of the Teachers' Questionnaire and presents the five (5) Scales and the corresponding questions included in each of them according to the loadings they show. It is useful to clarify that a lower acceptable loading limit of 0.300 is specified and loadings below this are rejected.

Table no3: Confirmatory factor Analysis ($F = 457 \ 100\%$) Rotated Component Matrix

In about Envir Education	nformation onmental	of Physical E and environ		Ental awarenes Physical Edu		values and F education	ocial Physical	Ex learning, En and Physical Education	
Q		Q		Q		Q		Q	
uestions	actor 1	uestions	actor 2	uestions	actor 3	uestions	actor 4	uestions	actor 5
1		5		1		2		4	
	474		322	6	695	5	727	1	726
2		6		1		2		4	
	457		356	7	744	6	762	2	532
3		7		1		2		4	
	580		545	8	717	7	822	3	525
4		8		1		2		4	
	499		614	9	611	8	855	4	674
		9		2		2		4	
			746	0	750	9	785	5	596

	1		2		3		4	
	0	794	1	714	0	770	6	766
	1	656	2	504	3	605		
	1	030	2	304	3	003		
	2	709	3	383	2	631		
	3	324	4	407	3	383		
	1 4	308			3	424		
	1				3			
	5	324			5	378		
					6	389		
					7	324		
					8	340		
					9	300		
					0 4	352		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

IV. Result

The Mann – Whitney U Test (see Table 4) for the two independent samples (males /females) showed that there is a statistically significant difference between men and women in the sample for the variables "Environmental awareness and Physical Education" (Sig. (2-tailed) 0,019 (U = 22757,5, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0,019 < 0,05), "Social values and Physical education" (Sig. (2-tailed) 0,001 (U = 21542,5, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0,001 < 0,05), and "Experiential learning, Environment and Physical Education" (Sig. (2-tailed) 0,049 (U = 24509,5 Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0,048 < 0,05). In the variables "Environmental awareness and Physical Education" (3,91 \pm 0,585) and "Social values and Physical education" (3,86 \pm 0,578) the highest mean value was collected by women, while in the variable "Experiential learning, Environment and Physical Education" (1,03 \pm 0,093) men were the ones who collected the highest mean value.

Table no4: Analysis of Physical Education teachers' Responses based on Gender

		Group Statistics				Test Statis	stics	
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. D.	Mann- Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp . Sig. (2- tailed)
Information about	Male	235	1,52	0,318	24286,00		- 1,14	,253
Environment al Education	Female	220	1,48	0,336	0	0	3	
Connection of Physical	Male	237	1,41	0,344	24188,00		- 1,34 2	,180
Education and environment	Female	220	1,36	0,319				
Environmenta l awareness and Physical	Male	237	3,78	0,577	22757,50 50960,50	2,35	,019	
Education	Female	220	3,91	0,585	O		3	
Social values and Physical	Male	237	3,86	0,578	21542,50	49745,50	3,21	,001
education	Female	220	4,04	0,585	U	U	2	
Experiential learning,	Male	235	1,03	0,093	· 24509,50 0		1,97 1	
Environment and Physical Education	Femal e	0 22	1,0	0,08				,048

From the results listed in Table 5 below, it emerged that there are statistically significant correlations between Physical Education course and the environmental awareness, in particular (r ,477, Sig. (2-tailed) ,000 < 0,05).

Table no5: Correlation of Physical Education and the environmental Awareness

Correlations	Spearman's rho	Environmental Awareness through P.E.
	Correlation Coefficient	,477**
Connection of Physical Education and environment	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	N	457
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

There are statistically significant correlations between Physical Education course and social values, in particular (r,418, Sig. (2-tailed),000 < 0,05) (see Table 6).

Table no6: Correlation of Physical Education and the Social values

Correlations	Spearman's rho	Physical Education course			
	Correlation Coefficient	,418**			
Social values and Physical education	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000			
	N	457			
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)					

From the results listed in Table 7 below, it emerged that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between experiential learning and the development of environmental awareness that is fostered in students though Physical Education course, with an r coefficient of -0.112, Sig. $(2\text{-tailed}) \ 0.017 < 0.05$.

Table no7: Correlation of experiential learning and the development of environmental awareness cultivated in students through Physical Education course.

Correla	Spearman's rho Experiential learning				
Environmental awareness	Correlation Coefficient	-0.112*			
cultivated in students through Physical Education course.	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.017			
	457				
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

V. Discussion

Sports in nature constitute curricular component of Physical Education that shall cope with body practices associated in the field of leisure, body care and health promotion^{5,40}. Considering the rapid changes and metamorphosis of current society, Physical Education teachers should schedule classes offering practices and experiences in natural spaces⁴¹. The aim of this study was to investigate the conceptions of Physical Education teachers on Physical Education and environmental awareness.

The literature shows that the role of teacher is to mediate between curriculum and learning and to contribute to students' acquisition of environmental awareness^{42,43}. Teacher should possess the essential knowledge for the development of skills and the formation of values. More particularly, teacher should possess knowledge and environmental attitudes, that will generate more environmentally conscious students⁴⁴.

In this context, and according to the report of the subjects participating in the research, environmental awareness should be developed in Physical Education class, since Physical Education constitutes a component of school curriculum, and it is imperative need to develop issues of the environmental degradation. In a study conducted with Physical Education teachers, it was found that Physical Education should incorporates in curriculum Environmental Education, since physical activity and motor skills are essential for the development of skills and the holistic development of students⁴³. However, the lack of environmental knowledge and the limited government support restrict them to incorporate Environmental education in Physical Education. Physical Education teachers assert that while the curriculum includes objectives and activities for physical activity in nature, they remain optional and without government support. It is of high importance the connection between Environmental Education and Physical Education in school curriculum, since beneficial activities that cover environmental knowledge can be carried out⁴⁵.

Teachers of Physical Education in the study believed that Physical Education contributes to an individual's acquisition of values. Within the realm of possibilities of practice in nature educational initiatives concentrate on enhancing values such as self – confidence, establishing skills for leadership and teamwork,

reforming relation between human and nature, advocating environmental values, developing gratitude for natural, cultural, and historical heritage, and increasing levels of social cohesion. Practice in nature is not limited to the environmental knowledge but displays the revolution of way of being and presents a facilitator of the increase of critical consciousness^{41,46}.

Practice nature through Physical Education generates students' personal and social evolution and by extension their environmental Awareness. According to Physical Education teachers' conception, contact with nature through practice and witnessing the deterioration of planet contributes to the acknowledgement of the problem, comprehension of the inseparable unit of human and nature and adoption of environmental behavior⁴¹. Teachers stated the experiences collected by students in natural environment far from the environmental of traditional school led to an alternation of behavior and by extension to develop respect for the environment⁴¹. Sports in nature provides recreation activities that not only are an aid to learning but also extensive training of values⁴¹. In this context, the literature indicates that practice in nature highlights the value of environmental awareness, collaborative work, and the development of values of Physical Education^{41,47,48,49,50}. However, part of these findings is supported by this research.

There is the belief that Physical Education not only should incorporates Environmental Education in curriculum but leads a privileged role for its development since both the content of Physical Education and the course based mainly on practical experiences and personal experiences⁴⁵. It is a privilege of Physical Education course that it can be developed by practice and experience that leads in meaningful learning⁵¹. What has been learned by doing and experiencing is permanent and can be transferred more easily to life^{52,53}.

Raising environmental awareness deals with "turning ecological ethics into life practice" or convert ecological principles into mind, body, and heart habits⁵⁴. Shaping individual's lifestyle can be associated with experiential learning. Experiential learning or learning by experience is expressed as one of the most important elements of personal development⁵⁵. Physical Education can provide students with a numerous opportunity to interact with nature, learn by experience and raise environmental awareness.

Although the teachers stressed the importance of the importance of raising awareness of environmental issues, there was disagreement between men and women. Specifically, we found that environmental awareness differed between male and female teachers. In addition, they disagreed on the association between Experiential Learning and Environmental awareness cultivated in students through Physical Education course as well as the extent to which social values are fostered in the context of physical education.

There are studies showing that women are more concerned, have more positive attitudes and behavior towards the environment than men^{56,57,58,59}. In contrast to the predominance of women over men, some other studies revealed that men had better rates than women in terms of environmental literacy and activism^{60,61,62}.

In a study on teachers, gender is the only independent variable causing significant differences in the 3 dependent variables: environmental knowledge, environmental concern and environmental attitude. Female teacher candidates (students) have a higher level of environmental awareness and environmental concern about the environment⁶³. According to studies^{64,65,66,67,68}, students are more likely to be more environmentally literate if their teachers are also more environmentally literate. The results of a reccunt research highlight the importance of Environmental Literacy education and the educational system is called upon to review Environmental Education, to introduce Education for Sustainable Development at all educational levels, calling students in the systematic adoption of good practices and actions from preschool age and not in individual actions⁶⁹.

VI. Conclusion

The national curriculum of Greece recognizes the practice in nature as a content of Physical Education with a vast range of possibilities for motor expression and opportunities of connectedness with nature⁵. Teacher is the mediator between national curriculum and learning as well as the stimulator for acquisition of environmental awareness by the students⁴¹. The nature of Physical Education course provides the privilege to Physical Education teachers to implement physical activities in nature that not merely improve motor skills but also enhance students' environmental awareness.

Physical Education classes display essential opportunities for the socio-moral development of students⁷⁰. Through Physical Education many values can be transferred to students. According to Physical Education teachers' statements, Physical education classes are more compelling in values education since they incorporate behaviors such as acting together, motivating the peers, fair play, helping each other, taking responsibility, respecting equality and the rights of others⁷¹. Physical Education cultivates both personal and social responsibility behaviours^{53,71}.

These findings provide new knowledge within the Physical Education and Environmental Awareness, serving as a link for future research that aims to harness the benefits of Physical education for Environmental Awareness and further on sustainability. One worth mentioning is the importance of Physical Education teachers' awareness and training. It is also emphasized that it is not enough to train PE teachers, but that Physical Education teachers' beliefs and practices are fundamental to ensuring the progress and sustainability of the planet.

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