

STUDENTS' HABITS THAT AFFECT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**Teuta ILJAZI¹, Svetlana PANDILOSKA GRNCHAROVSKA²**¹*University of Tetovo, Faculty of Pedagogy*²*University of Tetovo, Faculty of Pedagogy***Corresponding author e-mail: teuta.iljazi@unite.edu.mk*

Abstract

The change in lifestyle, the way of treating nature, the way of utilizing natural resources, equality in society, quality education, etc., are some of the goals of sustainable development according to the UNESCO Agenda (2018). This paper, based on the UNESCO agenda, has gathered data on students' habits that correspond to the sustainable development agenda. The instrument used to collect the data was an online questionnaire completed by 332 final-year high school students. The collected data were processed with the help of SPSS, whereupon we managed to confirm the hypotheses: Equal treatment of people from different cultural backgrounds correlates with equal respect for men, women, boys, and girls ($p=0.616$, $p=0.000$). Support for groups preserving the environment correlates with respect for all people regardless of age and gender ($p=0.503$, $p=0.000$). Behavior to maintain the cleanliness of public spaces correlates with providing help to poor people ($p=0.491$, $p=0.000$). The habit of not wasting water correlates with the habit of recycling ($p=0.453$, $p=0.000$). The obtained results show that students are aware that sustainable development implies social development, which will use resources to meet their own needs without endangering the living environment. From this, we ascertain that it is necessary to make efforts for a greater presence of content from this field in school curricula, as well as the continuous professional development of teachers to strengthen their competencies in this field.

Keywords: Sustainable development, quality education, educational contents for SD.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development implies development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In other words, when planning our daily activities, we should also think about future generations.

Sustainable development includes three interdependent and intertwined dimensions. The first is the economic dimension, which refers to economic resources, development and growth. The second is the environmental dimension, which refers to natural resources, protection and sustainable use of nature, and prevention and fight against pollution. And the third is the social dimension, which refers to social resources, solidarity and the fight against poverty. (National Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Republic of North Macedonia, p.8)

Hence, sustainable development is a continuous process that involves improving the integration of economic, social and environmental aspects. And our society should be a society in which economic progress should take place in parallel with environmental improvement. For this, there must be opportunities that allow individuals to contribute through their own initiatives. The population should realize benefits, but at the same time contribute to improving the general framework for employment, living conditions, social conditions as well as creating a better quality of life. To this end, the goals of sustainable development as a value orientation should be an integral part of the curricula of all levels of education.

Literature Review

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for developing policies aimed at eradicating all forms of poverty and inequality, protecting the environment, and ensuring prosperity and peace. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, is a universal commitment. It outlines 17 goals to be achieved by 2030. They are as follows: 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. (United Nations, Agenda 2030)

Within this framework, we explore the realization of three of these goals. The first goal aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms, including extreme poverty. It envisions a world of shared prosperity, where everyone enjoys a basic standard of living and access to social protection benefits, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. To empower people to break free from poverty, the goal emphasizes ensuring equal rights and access to economic and natural resources, as well as technology, property, and essential financial services. (Sustainable Development Goals, State Statistical Office, Republic of North Macedonia, 2019, p. 5). It also calls for support to communities affected by conflicts and climate disasters, highlighting the importance of policy commitment and resource mobilization as key drivers in accelerating poverty eradication.

According to the data of the State Statistical Office published in the Report on Sustainable Development Goals in relation to the first goal, according to the data from 2017, 41.6% of the population in our country is poor or socially excluded, while 9% of the employed are employed at risk of poverty. (Sustainable Development Goals, State Statistical Office, Republic of North Macedonia, 2019, p. 6).

The second goal that we are investigating concerns gender equality. This goal aims to achieve gender equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls in both public and private spheres. It emphasizes the significance of universal access to sexual and reproductive health, as well as reproductive rights, in addressing gender inequality. Additionally, the goal advocates for equal rights, recognition, and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work. It also seeks to ensure women's access to economic and natural resources, technology, essential financial services, and property. Furthermore, it calls for their full and effective participation in leadership roles, ensuring equal opportunities in political and economic decision-making at all levels. (Sustainable Development Goals, State Statistical Office, Republic of North Macedonia, 2019, p. 13). The adoption of rational policies

and legislation to promote gender equality is essential for eliminating gender discrimination and strengthening women's rights and opportunities across all spheres of society. Additionally, it supports the enhanced use of innovative technologies to further gender equality efforts. According to data from the State Statistical Office published in the Report on Sustainable Development Goals in relation to this goal, in the area of education, gender inequality among people who leave education is 2.9 percentage points to the detriment of women. (Sustainable Development Goals, State Statistical Office, Republic of North Macedonia, 2019, p. 14).

The sixth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations 2030 Agenda is to ensure access to and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Its main aspects include access to safe drinking water, sustainable management of water resources, which also includes reducing pollution and minimizing wastewater through recycling and reuse. This includes improving sanitation, protecting aquatic ecosystems, increasing water use efficiency, and international cooperation and capacity building. One of the main challenges in this framework is the pollution of water resources from industries and inappropriate waste management. We believe that the most effective way to address this challenge is through education about the importance of hygiene and sustainable sanitation practices.

Among the research that focuses on students' habits and their impact on sustainable development in our country, we will mention the research conducted by the Center for Vocational Education and Training "Introducing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Schools" which analyzes how educational programs can integrate the Sustainable Development Goals and encourage students to develop responsible habits. (csso.edu.mk). Also, the "Handbook for the Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development in Technical Vocational High Schools" offers guidelines for teachers on how to educate students on sustainable practices, including the development of critical thinking and responsible behavior. (Shaqiri, N., 2018). These documents emphasize that education plays a key role in forming students' habits that directly affect sustainable development.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted within the framework of secondary schools, namely the last year of secondary school students in the Republic of North Macedonia. The schools included are vocational schools and gymnasiums with Albanian and Macedonian language of instruction. The research was conducted between April and May 2024. Sustainable development for sustainable education is one of the important competencies that should be promoted at every level of education. Although sustainable development is present in the Republic of North Macedonia, it is not sufficiently present in the school curricula. In other countries, work is already being done in that direction, both in terms of curricula and in teacher training. Scandinavian countries and the surrounding countries invest more in this direction. Through this work, we wanted to identify which skills students possess, which correspond to the goals of Sustainable Development. The instrument used in this research was an online questionnaire with general questions about the gender of the student and the school they attend and their knowledge about sustainable development. The other set of questions was about students' daily habits, the answers to which have been scaled according to the 5-level Likert scale.

The number of students who completed the questionnaire is 332 in total, of which 188 are female. While according to the school they attend, 238 students from the total number of students are from vocational schools. These questions were supposed to be answered in the form of choosing 1 for female and 2 for male or 1 for gymnasium and 2 for vocational schools. In this research, we have applied a series of analytical approaches. Data processing, coding, descriptive statistics, and reliability analysis were performed with the help of SPSS. The answers to the questions that are scaled according to the Likert scale, ranging from 1- 1

completely disagree to 5 - *I completely agree*, were examined. Table 1 presents the data obtained for the group of questions related to students' daily habits. Chronbach α value = 0.801 has also been presented, which shows that the instrument used in this research is reliable. Table 1 presents the frequencies of students' responses according to the Likert scale (1- *I completely disagree* and 5- *I completely agree*), from which we also have the values of the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The lowest mean value ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.48$) is for the question about the engagement of students in school and classroom bodies. This average indicates that student engagement is lacking or is very low, which means that students lack experience from working at school and have little knowledge about the functioning of these bodies, whether at a school or classroom level. Schools should also deal with the extracurricular engagement of their students, which will result in their preparation for the functioning of society. Most of the other average values are between 3 and 4, which indicates that most of them possess the skills they were asked about. Above the value 4 are the answers to the questions about equal treatment of people with different cultures, equal treatment of people of different genders, support for organizations and groups working to protect the environment ($M=4.20$, $SD=1.72$; $M=4.29$; $SD=1.082$, $M=4.01$, $SD=1.14$) respectively. These average values indicate that almost all students possess these skills included in the questions asked.

Table.1 Students' daily habits

	Likert scale 1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree					Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Student's daily habits	1	2	3	4	5	0,801		
Where possible, I choose to cycle or walk when I go somewhere, instead of travelling by a motor vehicle.	36	17	84	56	139		3,74	1,33
I never waste water.	26	31	97	59	119		3,64	1,26
I recycle as much as I can.	41	32	106	65	88		3,38	1,306
When I use a computer or mobile to chat, to text, to play games and so on, I always treat others as respectfully as I would in real life.	19	16	72	75	150		3,97	1,17
I often make lifestyle choices which are not good for my health.	73	53	98	51	57		2,90	1,36
I do things which help poor people.	15	26	96	81	114		3,76	1,14
I pick up rubbish when I see it out in the countryside or in public places.	51	46	116	52	67		3,11	1,30
I don't think about how my actions may damage the natural environment.	75	46	89	47	75		3,00	1,447
I often purchase second-hand goods over the internet or in a shop.	142	52	72	28	38		2,30	1,38
I always separate food waste before putting out the rubbish when I have the chance.	47	32	111	53	89		3,32	1,34

I avoid buying goods from companies with a bad reputation for looking after their employees and the environment.	31	32	110	61	98		3,49	1,26
I have changed my personal lifestyle in order to reduce waste.	26	34	125	56	91		3,46	1,21
I work on committees (e.g., the student council, my class committee, the cafeteria committee) at my school.	136	47	63	34	52		2,45	1,48
I treat everyone with the same respect, even if they have another cultural background than mine.	10	13	65	58	186		4,20	1,72
I support an aid organization or environmental group.	16	13	81	63	159		4,01	1,14
I watch news programs or read newspaper articles to do with the economy.	51	53	103	49	76		3,14	1,35
I show the same respect to men and women, boys and girls.	14	8	52	53	205		4,29	1,082

From what was said above, we see that students are aware and possess the habits that ensure a fair approach to society, to the living environment; however, if these topics were examined more thoroughly and better conditions were provided for the realization of goals for a safer future, then our students would also be more attentive, more careful and more responsible for their future.

In this paper, to examine the correlation between the students' habits that are presented above, we used the Pearson coefficient and we managed to find that the habit of treating people with different cultural backgrounds equally correlates with the habit of equally respecting men, women, boys and girls ($\rho=0.616$, $p=0.000$). This shows that students respect all people equally and to them, age, gender or culture is not an obstacle.

Students who respect groups that deal with environmental protection equally respect people of different ages and genders; this is shown by the Pearson coefficient ($\rho=0.503$, $p=0.000$). Almost all students have habits of respecting both environmental protection groups and people regardless of their age or gender. This shows that if we engage more with them, their good habits will surely increase and become their daily routine. Being empathetic is a requirement in all societies; however, finding that characteristic in young people is the hope for the future for a well-established society. The processed data ($\rho=0.491$, $p=0.000$) show that the habit of keeping public spaces clean is correlated with the habit of helping poor people. But this is not enough if the responsible institutions do not fulfill their obligations and competencies. This paper has also proven that the habit of saving water is correlated with the habit of recycling. This is confirmed by the Pearson coefficient: $\rho=0.453$, with $p=0.000$, which means that the correlation between the two habits mentioned above is statistically reliable. If all these habits were supported, encouraged, and practiced by institutions, whether educational or non-educational, this society, this living environment, these vital resources would provide safe conditions for living, working, and various activities for many more years without endangering it.

Conclusions and proposals

Based on the results of our research, we can conclude that in the process of learning and teaching, it is necessary to respect the fact that sustainable development is based on the balance between the following principles: environmental protection, social justice, economic well-being, diversity and the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. Also very important is the development of critical, analytical and integrative thinking, problem solving and research, as well as a creative and innovative approach, effective communication, a socially and environmentally proactive and responsible attitude, the ability for professional and personal change, as well as initiative and readiness for lifelong learning. These principles are a roadmap for choosing the goals, tasks, outcomes, contents, forms, methods, techniques and activities through which education for sustainable development is achieved. For this purpose, it is necessary to prepare a document in which the importance of education for sustainable development in educational institutions will be adequately dimensioned. This means that it will be recognized that education for sustainable development lasts a lifetime, a sense of responsibility for the state of nature will be created, starting from the local to the global levels, and recognition of environmental problems as our own problems will be ensured, while steps to take appropriate measures will be encouraged. In order to realize the abovementioned, it is necessary to ensure accurate, complete and timely information to all stakeholders, as well as to encourage the partnership of all relevant stakeholders and to use all available resources.

In that context, the purposeful implementation of education for sustainable development is among the most important tasks of every state, namely local self-government. The existing Analysis for the Promotion and Integration of the Principles of Sustainable Development in the Curriculum in Secondary Education in the Republic of North Macedonia indicates that in most of the programs in secondary education, there are goals, tasks, contents that directly or indirectly relate to sustainable development. Such goals and contents are present to a greater extent in general education subjects, at the expense of vocational subjects, considering their numerous representations in the curricula. (analiza-nov2016-v1.pdf).

These experiences, as well as the knowledge gained on the basis of this and other similar research, should be concretized through recommendations given to teachers on how to recognize the connection of certain content with sustainable development and how to teach students.

We recommend the systematic integration of education for sustainable development into the curricula through well-defined guidelines, comprehensive support for teachers, and the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders. To achieve this, it is essential to develop a strategic framework that underscores the significance of these concepts and fosters critical thinking, personal responsibility, and lifelong learning among students.

The realization of these ideas in practice requires significant changes in the economic, social and cultural spheres, as well as placing the spiritual, intellectual and creative aspects of the personality of students at the center of attention.

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