

Türkiye • A Green Flag Eco-School's Journey towards ESD Practices

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Türkiye's unique geographic location and variable climate conditions have shaped its fauna and flora and human relationship with the nature. It is a country with a long history in terms of environmental issues, such as increasing forested areas around the country since 1920s (Dinçel, 2019¹⁵³), and this history is reflected in education. In the last three decades, many efforts have been made to address environmental problems and to incorporate a sustainability vision in different sectors and fields. In 1992, following to Rio Summit, Türkiye has included sustainable development policies in its National Development Plans and has adopted a green growth perspective according to the National Sustainable Development Report (RTMD, 2016¹⁵⁴). In terms of education, Türkiye's Sustainable Development Report (2012)¹⁵⁵ addressed the necessity of integrating sustainable development into the Turkish education system. It is suggested that national curriculum should emphasise sustainable production and consumption concepts to develop students' awareness on sustainability issues. In parallel with these developments, and through the curriculum changes in 2013 and 2018, Turkish primary and secondary school science curriculum incorporated sustainable development into its vision and goals. However, this led to sustainable development being included in the curriculum as a standalone subject, mostly linked to the themes of recycling and the efficient use of resources (see MoNE, 2018a¹⁵⁶). In addition, the social science curriculum included specific objectives that refer to developing students' environmental awareness and sustainability consciousness and incorporated sustainability related subjects such as human rights, equality, cultural heritage and global connections (MoNE 2018b¹⁵⁷). Despite this, in terms of formal education, Türkiye does not yet have an evident education policy related to ESD. However, more recently, there have been several attempts to integrate sustainable development into the curriculum. For example, there are a lot of initiatives promoting environmental management and sustainability in all sectors including education. Such as, the national "Zero Waste Project" launched in 2019. The aim of the project is to carry out zero waste actions in all public and private institutions including schools and universities, to reduce all types of wastes and separate wastes at the source (Atik, 2021¹⁵⁸). Schools are attending in the [Zero Waste Project](#)¹⁵⁹ through

various implementations such as collecting waste materials and building school library equipment via this 'upcycling' approach (MoNE 2022¹⁶⁰).

Moreover, following big wildfires in the forests of Türkiye last summer (2021), the country accelerated its work on climate change in all sectors, including education and saw the Ministry of National Education declaring a 'short notice' related to creating "environment and climate friendly schools". Based on this notice, an "environment and climate change" course will be taught at all secondary schools starting from the academic year 2022-2023, to raise awareness of climate change amongst younger generations. For the first time climate change will have a wider place in the national curriculum. The Ministry of National Education also emphasized that in line with initiating the "Clean Schools, Clean Energy Project", schools will become more nature friendly areas and the "Zero Waste Project" will spread to all schools to increase students' environmental awareness (MoNE, 2022¹⁶¹).

In Türkiye, green flag Eco-Schools mostly support environment and sustainability-oriented education. TÜRÇEV (Environmental Education Foundation of Türkiye) runs three environmental education programs which are Learning about Forest (LEAF), Young Reporters for Environment (YRE) and Eco-Schools (Okkullar, 2021¹⁶²). Among these programs, LEAF and Eco-School require the schools to link their plans adapted to the curriculum from branches at all levels related to the chosen theme. Since the 1990s, over a 1000 private and public schools enrolled in Eco-Schools program in Türkiye (Taşar, 2020¹⁶³). These plans combine to form the annual action plan and provides opportunity for interdisciplinary work to be developed in the schools. While it is evident that there has been a lot of effort regarding implementation of ESD in Türkiye's formal education system, there is still a need for additional support to promote ESD in an interdisciplinary way in the curriculum, as well as developing a holistic way of teaching ESD. Here, well established 'green schools' have an important role to highlight how implementing ESD in an integrative and transformative way can be realised. The following example is from such a school that shares experience learned after being an Eco-School since 2010.



Student participating in activities related to eco-school programme

Eco-Schools Program: ODTÜ GV 'green school' Journey •

ODTÜ GV School is a private not for profit foundation school that started in 1989. It is located on the Campus of Middle East Technical University in Ankara. The school caters for students from kindergarten upper secondary, ranging from 4 to 18 year-olds. As well as being an Eco School for over a decade the school has attained the ISO 45001 occupational health and safety management certification because of its profile as a safer place for its employees and students. Eco-School Coordinator Fulda Bol shares the significance of this. "Increasing the overall culture of health and safety serves to also increase the culture of health and safety from a Whole School Approach to Sustainability point of view. Getting this standard is not easy as it has gone through a series of checks to get it. It is prestigious for our school to have this certification". In Parallel with national developments in Turkish Education Policy, the school participates in the "Zero Waste Project" to reduce the amount of waste generated, establish an effective collection system, and contribute to recycling in the school.

"Our school aims to carry out joint projects with all our stakeholders, to develop environmentally sensitive projects, and to train our students as Environmental Leaders who will set an example for the society and the world. We encourage our students to participate by following projects that will raise awareness on environmental issues in our country and on international platforms. In addition, we are committed to complying with the current standards related to legal regulations and zero waste, to keep the "Zero Waste Golden Rules" of our School accessible to all relevant parties and to adopt them to all our employees and students, to implement and constantly improve the zero-waste management system we have established" (Science Coordinator- Pınar Doğru Atay).

Through the Eco-Schools programme environmental education and sustainable development goals are becoming a part of the school culture step by step:

"The Eco-Schools program is not just about learning and collecting recycling materials and sa-ving energy. Over the years, this content has been planned based on the fact that it should re-lect the philosophy of sustainability in education and should be a way of life. For students to be raised as sensitive citizens of the future, they discuss how human beings affect the natural environment and lives of other living things. They are expected to implement what they learn in the decisions they will make in their future lives"

(Eco-School Coordinator –Fulda Bol)

Over the years, Eco-Schools overarching principles have increasingly been embedded in the curricula at ODTÜ GV School. In recent years, subjects related to environmental education and UN sustainable development goals have been more reflected in different subject courses, even though they are not part of the Eco-School action plan. This sustainability-oriented transformation is seen not only in students, teachers and school staff, but also reflected at an institutional level. Less energy consuming LED lamps and energy efficient products were fitted throughout the school. Recycling bins were placed on every floor of the school building, and in the garden. While implementing these school practices, students always play a leading role in informing about why, and encouraging others to engage in these sustainability efforts.

Although ODTÜ GV school does not mention the whole school approach framework in their vision, their approach and practices closely align with the principles of WSA. In particular they describe that mainstreaming sustainability-

oriented education throughout the whole school is made possible with the implementation of the Eco-Schools program. They also encourage parent involvement through announcing their events on social media and on the school website and [school blog](#)¹⁶⁴, where they share events related to environment and sustainability. Moreover, the school encourages students to actively engage in Eco-School activities. Students' opinions are asked for and they are given responsibility to improve their learning. All the staff in the school participate in environment and sustainability related events. For example, while designing school permaculture garden the school building chief and school staff participate took part. many staff also contribute by offering training to students about specific

gardening activities or skills. Voluntary participation in environmental activities and events beyond the classroom has become part of the school culture. All subject teachers, students and school administration actively participate in these activities. The school administration facilitates these processes and creates opportunities for teachers and students and make arrangements to achieve the sustainability related goals. In terms of organisational aspects, there is an active, sustainable leadership to promote sustainability in the ODTÜ GV school. School leaders play an important role for initiation and sustaining ESD program at schools (Bennell, 2015; Carr, 2016¹⁶⁵). Active, supportive and long-term leadership is important to promote sustainability activities at schools.

Key WSA Principles in action at *ODTÜ GV school*

Capacity building

- School, administrators, teachers and staff are open to innovations and excited about increasing educational opportunities
- Experienced teachers always inform new teachers and give them opportunity to participate in sustainability-oriented programs at school
- Once a month teachers attend several online webinars related to environmental education organised by International Environmental Education Organization

Curriculum

- Teachers integrate sustainability related subjects into the existing curriculum with an implicit curriculum. This is possible with the implementation of environmental programs that are also accepted by the school administration
- Eco-school and LEAF programs provide a common framework for all subject teachers to use the most suitable sustainability-oriented elements in their curriculum as educational materials
- With the Eco-Schools report created at the end of each year, good examples and difficulties connected to curriculum implementation are shared with all teachers at school

Community Connections

- The school has developed community links with parents, non-governmental organizations and local administration surrounding sustainability actions
- School administration invites experts from different organisations to give seminars to students and teachers. For example, tree planting, and birdwatching activities are organized

Vision, Ethos, Leadership & Coordination

- All school staff, including all administrators, alongside the students, are committed to support sustainability activities
- School vision includes creating a peaceful and environmental school culture

Pedagogy & Learning

- In the lessons both discussion and problem-solving activities are implemented. Students deal with the present and possible problems of humanity in the future. They handle discussions at both individual and societal levels and work together to produce solutions
- School buildings, environment and school resources have been created and adapted in accordance with environmental and sustainability education practices
- Extra curricula studies are designed based on the wishes of the students. Students engage in some activities such as seed recognition, orienteering, educational outdoor games, mandala and forest walk
- A democratic environment is created in the school with the aim to take every idea into account
- Students are encouraged to hold meetings on their own and taught how to express their ideas easily and respect other ideas

Institutional Practices

- Practices include reduction water and energy consumption, reduction of waste production and increase of recycling facilities by putting bins on every floor at school
- Permaculture gardening activities are carried out in an area of approximately 70 square meters
- Efforts continue to establish and maintain a system that will reduce the amount of waste and use resources more efficiently in the whole school



School garden – soil protection and water conservation

Lastly, the Eco-Schools coordinator and teachers describe their permaculture garden project as an example of a vital resource and alternative learning environment that can be established easily and relatively low cost. Through utilising compost to enrich the soil the school have made an ecological and biologically garden that is a great teaching resource.

School staff took an active role in the processes of soil preparation, composting, planting seeds and planting in the establishment of a plant garden at school. Teachers from various year groups with their students guidance also made their plans for how to use this area in their lessons. Students also actively participate in gardening activities. Each year they sow seeds and take care of them themselves until they are ready for planting. They also use the garden for observing the interaction plants have with themselves, and with other living and non-living things. In addition, young people learn how to grow their own food and become more aware of healthy and sustainable food production.

Even though the school is labelled as a green flag Eco-School, different environmental programs are also implemented by teachers, such as, [Young Reporters for the Environment](#)¹⁶⁶ and environmental programs developed by TEMA (a local environmental foundation).

This is an example of one Eco-School's journey in Türkiye, where the whole school has been committed to environment and sustainability education for a long time, so much so these commitments have become a part of the school culture. However, while they have come a long way with integrating a WSA to ESD, and interdisciplinary work continually takes place by committed teachers and administrative staff to work in this way, there are still barriers to becoming fully committed to a WSA. Such as, the pressure of national exams, and not embedding ESD in the national curriculum. Time and an intense curriculum are

also major barriers to establishing a WSA to ESD at schools in Türkiye. Therefore, WSA practices are usually realised by a collection of dedicated teachers and school leaders. In order to reduce these barriers, to move towards a holistic and transformative ESD practice, and fully achieve a WSA at schools, a national educational policy, alongside financial and structural support, is needed.

Strengths/prospects

- All subject teachers contributing to sustainability-oriented programs
- Active student engagement and student led learning happens throughout the school
- Active and supportive administrators who facilitate the programs
- Parents are an important part of school culture
- Interdisciplinary teaching supports the integration of environmental and sustainability themes into all subject areas
- “Walking the talk” continually practices to make the school environment more sustainable and reduce ecological footprint

Challenges

- National curriculum does not incorporate ESD in an integrative way as sustainable development concept is placed as a standalone subject
- Limited support for integrative and holistic approaches to ESD in national curriculum
- National exams, intense curriculum hinders ESD and teachers' report a lack of time to maintain sustainability projects
- Limited community connections to disseminate these studies to outside the school
- Limited collaboration with other schools in the local area. Schools could collaborate more to work on sustainability issues in the local community