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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research and Trends in the Field of Environment Education from 2012 to 2016: A Content Analysis of MA Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations in Turkey**

İkramettin DASDEMIR*
University of Ordu, Ordu, TURKEY

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Abstract

This paper aims at making a content analysis of 124 MA and Ph.D. theses in the field of environmental education that were published by Turkish universities from 2012 to 2016. These were selected based on keywords about environmental education. Among the 133 theses on the environment by in the Turkish universities, 124 out of them were identified as being related to the topic of solely environment education. In the analysis, first, these theses were cross-analyzed by published years, university, department and research topic. Next, these theses on different sub-topics were analyzed according to their research settings, participants, research design types, and research methods. The findings showed that the highest number of these were carried out in Gazi University, MA, most theses were carried out in the department of sciences, mixed method was mostly used in these theses, the setting of environmental education and the importance of environmental education were mostly chosen as research topics, the population of the study was mostly chosen among the university students and secondary school students, environmental attitude scale was mostly used as data collection tool and parametric tests were frequently used. Suggestions about the future studies on environmental issues were made at the end of the study.

Keywords: Environmental Education, MA theses, Ph.D. dissertation, Qualitative research, Content analysis.

Introduction

The environment is a setting where human beings and all other living species come together and interact with each other (Aktepe & Girgin, 2009). Human activities have both negative and positive effects on the environment (Özmen & Özdemir, 2016). In this sense, understanding the effects of lifestyles and daily activities on environment maybe valuable to constraint the negative effects on the environment (Chepesiuk, 2007). For example, technology development may affect human activities. The technological advancement not only facilitates human life but it also negatively impacts upon natüre and human life (Özbey & Şema, 2017; Yılmaz, Aydın & Bahar, 2015). Further, the development of the technology can also threaten the life quality and even the health of the societies (Akçay & Pekel, 2017). As a result of deterioration of the natural and artificial environment, Environmental problems are encountered not only in the places they are observed but also they can be seen nearly all over the world and this has led the societies to find a solution to their own environmental problems (Akçay & Pekel, 2017; Yılmaz, 2012). Raising the individuals' environmental awareness and

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***E-mail:** ikramettindasdemir@gmail.com
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consciousness may be one of the effective solutions (Akçay & Pekel, 2017). In this sense, environmental education should be provided to individuals to increase awareness and sensitivity to find solutions some environment problems (Akçay & Pekel, 2017; Yılmaz, 2012). It is believed that promising solutions can be generated with such an education (Reynolds, 2010; Scholz & Binder, 2011). Environmental education is a process that allows individuals to develop environmental awareness, to gain positive and permanent environmentally friendly behavioral changes towards environment; further, it refers to understanding natural, historical, cultural, and socio-esthetical values (Erdoğan, 2016; Özoğlu, 1993). The topic of environmental education has become a current issue in order to create more healthy and safer environment for human beings (Yıldırım, 2015). Because of the importance of environmental education, almost all countries around the world have become sensitive to environmental education. Especially, the developed countries consider that environmental education must be included in their curricula (Akçay & Pekel, 2017) and they think that the foundations of environmental education in the primary and secondary education are crucial (Summers, Kruger & Childs, 2000). In such an education curriculum, generating positive environmental awareness within the individuals and to develop behaviors may be possible (Alp *et al.,* 2008; Flowers, 2007; Yılmaz, 2012; Yıldız, Sipahioglu & Yılmaz, 2008). Including particular subjects about environmental issues in teaching and learning environments can enhance research in this field by teachers and students and researchers (Markle 2008; Yılmaz, 2012).

Particularly, the researchers have begun to conduct more studies about environment because of the following reasons: a) industrial and technological developments, b) nature and damages on natural habitats, c) their negative effects on human health, air, water, d) land pollution caused by radiation and poisonous gases released by industries, e) decreasing life quality, and e) emergence of their effects at the beginning of the 21st century and threatening both humans and natural habitat (Yılmaz, 2012).

In the last decade, several studies on environmental education have been carried out (Özbay & Şema, 2017). The topic of environmental education has also attracted many postgraduate researchers. Such post-graduate level theses and dissertations can guide many further studies and they also generate solutions for the problems existing in the literature (Özbay & Şema, 2017). Although the postgraduate thesis studies have been increasing constantly, there are not many studies to examine the trend directions in the field of environmental education (Karadağ, 2009). Nevertheless, the available postgraduate level of research has focused on different aspect of the field (Yılmaz *et al.,* 2015). For example, among these studies, the experimental studies have focused on global sustainability (Leiserowitz, Kates & Parris 2004), on chemical bonds (Ünal *et al.*,2006), on science education, education technologies, computer technologies, and education sciences (Çalık *et al.*, 2008; Karadağ, 2009; Şimşek *et al.*, 2008; Uğur-Erdoğmuş, 2009), on energy concept (Kurnaz & Çalık, 2009), computer-assisted language learning (Uzunboylu & Özçınar, 2009). Moreover, the recent literature has shown that several studies have focused environmental education, including MA thesis and Ph.D. dissertations. Trend analysis has been used in different fields to examine frequently investigated topics and methods used in research such as language education (Han & Burgucu, 2012). In the field of environmental education, Leeming et al. (1993) investigated the trend in environmental education between 1974 and 1993. Sümer (2009) examined the environmental issues included in the theses carried out in local government. Yılmaz (2012) analyzed the theses published about environmental education between 1992 and 2011. Özbay and Şema (2017) examined only 65 theses on environmental education published between 2012 and 2016. Yılmaz et al. (2015)

analyzed both full texts and abstracts of the theses on environmental education between 1992 and 2011.

The previous literature has indicated that very few studies investigated the trend in the field of environmental education in the postgraduate level studies in Turkey. Amon these studies, the researchers reached a very limited number of studies. The aim of this paper is to bridge the research gap by examining all 133 master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations published on environmental education in Turkey between 2012 and 2016. These theses should be given as a whole so that they can guide the researchers. It is important to carry reliable and inclusive studies which can lead to new studies by interpreting so much information (Akgöz, Ercan & Kan, 2004).

Methodology

Content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. Content analysis is helpful in terms of increasing the quality of journals, the decisions and policies made for allocating resources and funds, and proposing the future directions for the field (Maurer & Khan, 2010). On the other hand, content analysis is one of the common qualitative research techniques that is used to interpret meaning from written data (Hsieh & Shanno Un, 2005).

Data Collection

The postgraduate theses carried out about environmental education between 2012 and 2016 were explored and investigated in this study. As a result of scanning of National Theses and Dissertations Centre's database of Higher Education Research Council, 133 theses on environmental education that were carried out between 2012 and 2016 were reached. Out of these 133 theses, 100 of them are full-text studies and 33 of them are abstracts. As a result of the investigation of the theses, 124 of them were considered appropriate for the study. Out of these 124 theses, 100 of them are master's theses and 24 of them are doctoral dissertations. To secure the validity and reliability of this study, a scheme adapted from previous research was used in this study. The schema includes two parts: a) general information about the thesis and dissertations (e.g. publication year, authorship, and institution affiliation, region and country/territory of focus), b) coding methodologies of the articles (e.g research areas, research approaches, research methods, analysis techniques, and application of statistics). In this study, the two coders received a Ph.D. degree in the field of education. The keywords of the articles were used to determine the research areas of the thesis and dissertations. The coders were given the specific topics and keyword list (see Table 5). They analyzed a total of 133 theses published in the 41 universities in Turkey. There was a weak agreement between the two coders. Nine theses were reconsidered by another coder. The reliability of coding was measured, using Miles and Huberman (1994) reliability formula (Reliability= agreement/ agreement + disagreement x100). The reliability was calculated to be 0.92.

Data Analysis

A schema for coding the variables by Yılmaz (2012) was adapted for the data coding in this present the study. After the form was adapted, two experts checked the schema and necessary corrections were made in line with their views. This form consists of the year when the theses were written, types of theses, the university where the theses were carried out, department, research topic, the study group (the population of the study), research method, teaching method, data collection tool, and data analysis techniques. The data obtained from the schema were analyzed, considering each research problem and the statistics depending on frequency distribution related to the variables.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the theses examined within the context of the study were presented. Descriptive information regarding the type of the studies (e.g. MA and Ph.D.) was presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Descriptive information belonging to the thesis type of the studies

Types of Theses	Frequency	Percentage
Master's Thesis	100	80,7
Doctoral Thesis	24	19,3
Total	124	100

The Table 1 shows that a total 124 post-graduate theses consisting of 100 master's theses and 24 doctoral theses were carried out between the years 2012-2016. Table 2 presents the distribution of these theses by years.

Table 2.

Distribution of theses published on environmental education according to years

Types of Thesis	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Master's Thesis	28	21	17	17	16	100
Doctoral Thesis	3	7	4	7	4	24
Total	31	28	21	24	20	124

The Table 2 shows that the master's theses and doctoral dissertations on environmental education were published mostly in 2012 and very few studies were carried out in 2016.

Table 3 exhibits distribution of theses by topic.

Table 3.

Distribution of theses on environmental education in terms of research topics

Research Topics	Frequency
Biological diversity	4
*Attitudes towards the environment	18
*Raising awareness of the environment	11
*Environmental knowledge	6
Environmental consciousness	8
The place and importance of environmental education	34
Perceptions about environmental education	5
Environmental literacy	8
* Environmental problems	17
Preservation of the environment	5
*Perceptions about the environment	6
Environmental education in the natural environment	2
*Recycling	2
Environmental education in out-of-school settings	3
Sustainable environmental education	10
Total	139

The ones with the sign* were explored with different subjects

The Table 3 shows that the MA thesis and dissertations focused on different research sub-topics on environmental education. The following topics were studied frequently: the place and importance of environmental education (f=34), attitudes towards environment (f=18), environmental problems (f=17), raising environmental awareness (f=11) and Sustainable environmental education (f=10) respectively. Table 4 presents the distribution of theses carried out about environmental education by departments.

Table 4.

Distribution of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations carried out about environmental education by departments

Departments	Master's Theses	Doctoral Theses	Total
Department of Family and Consumer	1	-	1
Department of Biology Education	12	6	18
Department of Geography Education	2	1	3
Department of Environmental Education.	4	2	6
Department of Education Sciences	1	-	1
Department of Education Programs	6	1	7
Department of Education Management and Inspection	3	-	3
Department of Philosophy and Science of Religion	1	-	1
Department of Science Education	48	7	55
Department of Public Administration	1	-	1
Department of Chemistry Education	1	1	2
Department of Architecture	-	1	1
Department of Pre-school	5	3	8
Department of Landscape Architecture	1	-	1
Department of Art Teaching	1	-	1
Department of Primary School Teaching	4	-	4
Department of Social Sciences Teaching	9	-	9
Department of Social Environment Sciences	-	2	2
Total	100	24	124

The Table 4 shows that the maximum number of studies about environmental education was carried out in the Department of Science Education (f=55). Table 5 presents the universities where the master's and doctoral theses published in.

Table 5.

Distribution of master's and doctoral theses published by the universities and years

The University where The Study is carried out	Master's Theses					Doctoral Theses					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Abant İzzte Baysal Unv.	1		1							1	3
Adıyaman University				1							1
Adnan Menderes University	1		1		1						3
Afyon Kocatepe University.	1			1							2
Ahi Evran University	2				1						3
Aksaray University				1							1
Ankara University						1	2				3
Atatürk University				1			1		1		3
Balıkesir University		1									1
Bilkent University	1				1						2
Boğaziçi University	1						1				2
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart		1	1		1						3
Çukurova University			1								1
Dokuz Eylül University	2	1						1		1	6
Ege University			1								1
Erciyes University	3										3
Fatih University			2								2
Fırat University				2	1						3
Gazi University	3	8	2	4	2		2	2	4		27
Gazi Osman Paşa University	1		1		1						3
Hacettepe University	3	2							2		7
İnönü University	1	2				1					4
İstanbul University			1								1
Kafkas University	1										1
Karadeniz Teknik University	1	2					1				4
Kastamonu University		2			1						3
Marmara University					1	1					2
Mehmet Akif Ersoy University	1										1
Mersin University				1	1						2
MuğlaSıtkı Kocaman University	1			1	1						3
Necmettin Erbakan University	1		1	1							3
Orta Doğu Teknik University		1	1					1			3
Ondokuz Mayıs University										2	2
Ömer Halis Demir University	2		1	1	1						5
Pamukkale University	1			2	1						4
Sakarya University		1									1
Süleyman Demirel University			1								1
Trakya University					1						1
Yeditepe University			1	1							2
Yüzüncü Yıl University					1						1
Total	28	21	17	17	16	3	7	3	7	4	124

The Table 5 indicates that Gazi University published the maximum number of both master's theses and doctoral dissertations (f=27) and doctoral dissertations were not carried out in most of the universities. Table 6 presents the distribution of theses by study group.

Table 6.

Distribution of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations carried out about environmental education by the study group

Study Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Pre-school students	1	1	-	4	2	8
*Elementary school students	4	2	1	-	1	8
*Secondary school students	16	11	3	7	8	41
*High education students	4	4	4	5	-	17
University students	11	9	8	8	5	41
*Teachers	3	1	2	2	2	10
* Adults/Public	2	-	2	-	-	4
Document	1	-	2	-	2	5
Total	42	28	22	26	20	138

The ones specified with the sign *were included in some studies with different study groups

The Table 6 shows that university students (f=41) and secondary school students (f=41) were the most frequent study groups or samplings while adults (f=4) were the least selected participants. Table 7 presents the distribution of the research methods by years.

Table 7.

Distribution of the research methods used with the theses published on environmental education by years

Research Method	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Action research		1				1
*Descriptive study	7	3	3	2		15
Experimental study	5		2	5	5	17
Case study		3	1			4
Document analysis			2		1	3
Phenomenography			1			1
*Relational screening		5	1	1		7
Mixed method	10	8	5	6	8	37
*Cross-sectional study	1			1		2
Correlation			1			1
*Causal study		1				1
Phenomenology	1					1
Screening model	6	8	3	8	4	29
Not specified	2		3	1	2	8
Total	32	29	22	25	20	127

The ones with the sign* were explored with different *research methods*

The Table 7 shows that 13 different research methods were used. The following methods were used frequently: mixed method (f=37), screening model (f=29), experimental design (f=17) and descriptive study (f=15) respectively. Table 8 presents the data collection tools used in these environmental education postgraduate studies.

Table 8.

Data collection tools used with the theses published on environmental education

Data collection tools	Frequency
Open-ended question	9
Achievement test	18
Testimonial-document	4
The scale of biodiversity literacy	1
Biology attitude scale	1
Environmental attitude/ awareness/ knowledge scale	102
Behavior scale	11
Critical thinking scale	3
Science/matching attitude scale	3
Interviews	19
Observation form	5
Word association	2
Interview	4
Self-evaluation form	5
Writing and drawing	2
Total	191

The Table 8 shows that different data collection tools were used in the theses. The most frequently used data collection tool is environmental awareness/ knowledge attitude scale (f=102). Next, interviews (f=19) and environmental knowledge tests (f=18) were used frequently. Table 9 presents the teaching methods used in the theses.

Table 9.

Teaching methods used in the theses

Techniques used	Frequency
Active learning techniques	11
Nature education	9
Computer-assisted environmental education	2
Implementation of environmental education program	2
Total	24

The Table 9 shows that different teaching methods were used in the theses. The most frequently used method is active learning techniques (f=11). Next nature education (f=9), implementation of the environmental education program (f=2) and Computer-assisted environmental education (f=2) were more frequently employed in the studies. Table 10 presents the data analysis techniques used in the studies.

Table 10.

Data analysis techniques used in the studies carried out about environmental education

Data Analysis Technique	Frequency
*Descriptive statistics	13
*Descriptive/ content analysis	40
*Parametric tests	54
*Non-Parametric tests	18
Not specified	14
Total	139

The Table 10 shows that parametric tests (f=54) and content analysis (f=40) were the most common data analysis techniques in the studies.

Results and Discussion

The study examined the trend in the post-graduate thesis studies on environmental education in Turkey between the years 2012-2016. Overall, first, it was found that the number of master's theses (% 80,3) was more in number than doctoral dissertations. It is considered that this situation was due to the number of master's program in universities, that is, there are more master's programs in this field than doctoral programs in Turkey.

Because the requirements for the opening doctorate level postgraduate program in Turkey more challenging than opening a master degree program as such there must be more faculty members with an associate degree or full professor in the related department. Further, program requirements for student admission are more than those of master degree programs.This result is compatible other content analysis research with the result in the literature (Çiltaş, Güler & Sözbilir, 2012; Polat, 2013; Temel, Şen & Yılmaz, 2015; Yavuz, 2016; Yılmaz et al. 2015)

Second, it was found that there has been a considerable increase in the number of the theses during the last five years. This result is in line with the previous research (Akdemir & Karakuş, 2016; Leeming *et al.,* 1993; Onwuegbuzie, & Daniel, 2003; Özbay & Şema, 2017).

Third, it was found that the number of theses on environmental education between the years 2012-2016 differed by the years as such the number of postgraduate theses were the highest in number in 2012 (f=31), indicating that environmental problems attracted more attention during these years. This may be because that higher education council in Turkey launched a new law that requires the departments in the education faculties in Turkey can only produce postgraduate studies in the education field. This finding is in line with a study by (Yılmaz *et al.*, 2015), in which the postgraduate studies between the years 1992-2011 were analyzed. In that study, it was found that the number of post-graduate theses differed according to the years and the maximum number of theses were completed between 2008 and 2011.

Fourth, it was found in the study that the theses published on environmental education were mostly carried out in Gazi University (f=27) as Gazi University had a larger number of academic staff and postgraduate programs. This result is complementary with the result of Yılmaz et al. (2015). Similarly, Yılmaz et al. (2015) found that Gazi University was the most prolific university as most of the thesis studies between 1992 and 2011 were completed there. Further, it was found that Department of Science Education

carried out most studies (f=55). The reason for this situation may be that science teaching program includes subjects related to nature and environment.

Fifth, regarding the study groups or samplings of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations, higher education students (f=41) and secondary school students (f=41) were more frequent. This result is in line with the previous studies (Çalık *et al.,* 2008; Tatlı & Adıgüzel, 2012; Uğur- Erdoğmuş, 2009; Yılmaz, 2012,). In a study by Çalık et al. (2008), it was found that the post-graduate theses carried out about science education between 1990 and 2007 used 7th-grade students as study sample. In a study by Uğur - Erdoğmuş (2009), tertiary level students were used as the study group of the thesis studies carried out about computer technologies. It is indicated that this may be due to context and the reaching sample groups easily.

Sixth, regarding the research sub-topics, most of the studies focused on the place and importance of environmental education (f=34), attitudes towards environment (f=18) and Environmental problems (f=17). This result is in line with the result of Yılmaz et al. (2015) in which attitudes towards environment (f=63), environmental consciousness (f=43), environmental knowledge (f=34), and environmental problems (f=2) were more frequent sub-topics. Maybe it is assumed that environmental education can solve most of the environmental problems.

Seventh, 13 different research methods were used and mixed-method approach was the most preferred method (f=37). This result is not in line with the previous studies (Bacanak *et al.*,2011; Çalık *et al.,* 2008; Karadağ, 2010; Leiserowitz, Kates & Parris, 2004; Şimşek *et al.*, 2008; Tavşancıl *et al.*,2010 ; Uğur-Erdoğmuş, 2009; Yılmaz *et al.*,2015). In a study by Yılmaz et al. (2015), it was found that the theses studies between 1992 and 2011 used frequently experimental design. Recently, research in this field has frequently employed mixed-method approach (Yavuz, 2016).

Further, different teaching techniques were used with the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. This result is in line with the studies of Kurnaz & Çalık (2009) and Yılmaz et al. (2015). The result of the study conducted by Kurnaz & Çalık (2009) showed that using student-centered teaching techniques were more common. On the other hand, Yılmaz et al. (2015) found 27 different teaching methods employed in the postgraduate level studies. The reason for this situation is that with the renewal of the curricula in elementary and secondary education and higher education beginning in 2014, student-centered teaching techniques have been included more in the curriculum.

Next, different data collection tools were used in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Among these data collection tools, it was revealed that environmental attitude/ awareness/ knowledge scale was most frequently used (f=102). It can be implicated that attitude scale may have been preferred frequently in the data collection as they are easy to use and widely available tools (Baş, 2005). This result is in line with previous studies in which questionnaires, attitude scales, and achievements tests were the most commonly used measurement tools (Leiserowitz *et al.*,2004; Şimşek *et al.,* 2008; Tavşancıl *et al.,* 2010; Uğur- Erdoğmuş, 2009; Yılmaz *et al.*, 2015).

Finally, it was also found that parametric tests were the most frequently preferred data analysis methods in the master's theses and doctoral dissertations as found in previous research by Tavşancıl et al. (2010) and Yılmaz, (2012), indicating that parametric tests are more reliable.

Recommendations

1. It is suggested that because of the limited number of studies carried out with the adults about environmental education, adults should be chosen as a study group in the future studies.

2. It is suggested that different teaching techniques used in the teaching of environmental education should be comparatively analyzed.

3. It is suggested that a trend analysis over the journal articles on environmental education should be conducted.

4. It is suggested that phenology research should be studied over environmental education

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2012-2016 Yıllarında Çevre Eğitimi Alanı Eğilim Araştırması: Türkiyede Üretilen Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezlerinin Bir İçerik Analizi

İkramettin DASDEMİR
Ordu Üniversitesi, Ordu, TÜRKİYE

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2012-2016 yılları arasında Türkiye'de çevre eğitimi ile ilgili yapılan lisansüstü tezleri inceleyerek, tezler hakkında genel yönelimleri ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu tezlerin seçimini çevre eğitimi anahtar kelimesiyele tespit edilmiştir. Bu anahtar kelimeyle 133 teze ulaşılmıştır. İnceleme sonucunda 124 tezin uygun olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yaklaşımlarından içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Tezlerin analizinde yayın yılı, üniversite, bölüm, araştırma konusu, örneklem, araştırma yöntemi, araştırma testleri, yer almıştır.Araştırma sonucunda 2012-2016 yılları arasında yüksek lisans tezlerinin doktora tezlerinin sayısından oldukça fazla olduğu, en fazla tezin gazi üniversitesinde, en fazla fen bilgisi anabilim dalında olduğu, bu tezlerde en fazla karma yönteminin uygulandığı, konu olarak en fazla çevre eğitiminin yeri ve öneminin seçildiği, örneklem gruplarının en fazla yüksek öğretim öğrencileri ile ortaokul öğrencilerinden oluştuğu, veri toplama aracı olarak en fazla çevre tutum ölçeğinin kullanıldığı ve en fazla parametrik testlerin kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda çevre eğitimi ile ilgili yapılacak çalışmalara yönelik önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevre Eğitimi, Lisansüstü tezler, Nitel araştırma, İçerik analizi

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***E-mail: ikramettindasdemir@gmail.com**
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