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Promised Future, Silent Pages: Tracing Sustainability in the Turkish Secondary School English Curriculum

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which environment and sustainability themes are included in secondary school English curricula in Turkey. First, the general structure of the English curriculum was analyzed, and then the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade textbooks were evaluated through content analysis. The findings revealed that the curriculum adopts an eclectic pedagogical approach aiming to enable students to use English in real-life contexts and develop communicative competence. However, the analysis showed that this vision is not adequately reflected at the content level. Particularly in the 5th grade textbooks, the themes of environment and sustainability are not included, and in the other grades, they are mostly limited to only one unit each. This represents an important deficiency in fostering students' environmental awareness. Consequently, it is suggested that the pedagogical goals of the curriculum be reflected in teaching materials and sustainability themes be addressed more holistically and extensively in textbooks.

Keywords: *English language teaching, environmental education, sustainability, curriculum analysis*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, language education has focused on the acquisition of the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). However, rapid innovations in information technologies, globalization, and the increasing interaction of multicultural societies have necessitated the adoption of a more holistic and multidimensional approach in education systems. Thus, language education aims not only to provide linguistic competence but also to equip individuals with 21st century skills such as critical thinking, intercultural awareness, social responsibility, and global citizenship (Byram, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). Global citizenship requires individuals to feel responsibility towards the world community as well as their own, to recognize universal human rights, and to be sensitive to global issues such as sustainability (Andrzejewski & Alessio; 1999; Schattle, 2010). Accordingly, English language teaching (ELT), as a dominant tool of global communication, needs to aim not only to increase students' communicative competence but also their sensitivity to environmental and social problems around the world. Moreover, activities that promote environmental education in English lessons foster students' critical thinking and professional skills, enabling them to develop into more engaged and responsible global citizens (La Rosa Ponce & González, 2022).

The increase in environmental problems on a global scale has made it necessary to address sustainability themes in educational systems in a more visible and interdisciplinary manner. In this regard, foreign language education not only serves to develop linguistic competencies but also has the potential to strengthen students' critical thinking skills, intercultural awareness and social responsibility (Yu et al., 2024; Raphael & Nandan, 2024). In particular, languages such as English, which is a global communication language, are considered as a meaningful tool in conveying sustainable development goals (SDGs) to students (Yıldırım & Aytan, 2025). In Turkey, various structural steps have been taken in recent years to strengthen sustainability education, and

teacher training programs and primary education curricula have allegedly begun to include content aligned with sustainable development goals (Alkış, 2008; Yıldırım & Aytan, 2025). For example, the restructuring of the curriculum at the primary education level aims to improve students' environmental awareness at an early age. Despite these developments, there are still various structural challenges in aligning education programs with sustainable development goals in an integrated manner. In this regard, the extent to which the English curriculum at the secondary school level in Turkey overlaps with sustainability themes has not yet been addressed in a holistic and critical manner. This deficiency, both in terms of the orientation of educational policies and pedagogical practices in practice, limits the integration of sustainability education into foreign language teaching and narrows the social function of language teaching. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the current situation regarding the representation of environmental awareness and sustainability themes in the secondary school English curriculum in Turkey and to identify possible areas for improvement.

1.1 Brief overview of Turkish education system regarding English Language Teaching

In the Turkish education system, English language teaching (ELT) is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Kırkgöz, 2007). This framework adopts an approach that seeks to develop language learning as a real-life communicative skill and not just as a subject of study. That is, the curriculum encourages language use in an authentic communicative environment and presents English to students in a real-life context. In this regard, an eclectic approach is applied, blending different teaching methods to support the development of students' language skills.

The aim of the curriculum is to provide students with a positive attitude from the beginning of the language learning process. The curriculum emphasizes age-appropriate tasks and problem-solving skills to help students develop communicative competence. At the same time, the curriculum enables students to experience learning in a fun and motivating way. By using authentic materials such as drama, role-play and hands-on activities, students are encouraged to use English as an active means of communication.

In Turkey, ELT officially starts as early as the second grade of primary school as part of the curriculum. In Grades 2 and 3, the focus is mainly on speaking and listening skills, while reading and writing skills are added as students progress to more advanced levels. In secondary school, in addition to the transfer of grammar, the aim is for students to acquire the ability to use English effectively (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). This process treats language learning not only as the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but also as a life skill in which students can actively use their language skills in everyday life. In this way, students are expected to become competent enough to use English not only as an academic tool but also to use it effectively in communication.

1.2 Official ELT Curriculum Guidelines in Turkey

As of 2024, although a new curriculum was published in Turkey under the name “Türkiye Yüzyılı (Century of Turkey)”, there is no mention of the ELT program in this new curriculum. This shows that the curriculum changes implemented in 2024 did not include an update for ELT and that the 2018 curriculum remains valid for ELT at the national level. The English curriculum in Turkey is prepared and implemented by the Ministry of National Education (MEB). The program is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and aims to provide

students with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). The program focuses on developing language skills in real-life scenarios, providing students with the opportunity to use English as a means of communication.

The 2018 ELT Program recognizes that the ability of Turkish citizens to communicate effectively at the international level is one of the key elements of economic, political and social development. In this context, English language proficiency plays an important role in global interaction and cooperation. The program emphasizes that language learning is not only an academic goal, but also a tool that enables individuals to communicate effectively at the international level (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018). The program also states that for language learning to be meaningful, materials need to be directly related to students' daily lives. This approach requires language learning to be designed in a way that enables students to actively use language in real interactions, rather than merely transferring theoretical knowledge. Accordingly, the main aim of language teaching is to enable students to use English as a means of communication, and the development of language skills is not only a grammatical learning process but also takes place in a broader communicative context.

The curriculum determines how students will interact in the language learning process and how teachers will shape this process. Various dimensions of learning strategies are addressed and it is emphasized that teachers can select appropriate materials and tasks for students in classroom tasks and activities. Furthermore, the importance of providing positive feedback during the assessment and testing processes is also emphasized.

Although the curriculum presents a strong discourse on sustainability and environmental education, how this discourse is concretized, especially in the context of foreign language education, has not yet been sufficiently demonstrated. This study aims to fill the gap in this field and examines the extent to which sustainability and environmental themes are included in English curricula and textbooks at the secondary school level. In this way, it is aimed to provide a holistic assessment of the level of integration of sustainability education into foreign language teaching in line with the contextual structure of curriculum documents and teaching materials.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted with a qualitative research design to determine to what extent the themes of environmental awareness and sustainability are included in the English curriculum at the secondary school level in Turkey. The main data source of the study was the Secondary School English Curriculum, which was updated by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in 2018 and is still in force. In addition, the textbooks referenced in the curriculum (5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English textbooks) were also used as additional data sources. In this way, both the theoretical orientation of the curriculum and its reflection in practice were analyzed from a holistic perspective.

After the data collection process, two different types of analysis were conducted. First, in order to determine whether themes such as environment, climate change and sustainability are present in the curriculum, a presence-absence scan was conducted within the scope of documentary analysis as suggested by Bowen (2009). This analysis aimed to systematically identify whether certain themes were explicitly present in the curriculum documents. Secondly, content analysis was used to assess how these themes were represented in the textbooks, in which contexts and to what extent they were addressed. Content analysis is a systematic type of analysis that aims to determine

how certain themes and concepts are treated in texts (Krippendorff, 2018). In this regard, sample texts, dialogues, reading texts, and activities in the textbooks were analyzed in terms of how they were related to environmental themes and how much green vocabulary they covered.

The study aims to reveal the extent to which environmental awareness and sustainability issues are attempted to be integrated with students' language skills in English language teaching. The main research question of the study is as follows:

RQ) To what extent and how are issues related to ecology, climate change and environmental sustainability included in the English Language Teaching Program published by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in Turkey in 2018?

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Curriculum Overview: Themes of Ecology, Climate Change and Sustainability

An analysis of the current English curriculum at secondary school level in Turkey reveals that the extent to which environmental themes such as ecology, climate change and sustainability are addressed varies according to grade level. In the Grade 5 syllabus, although there is no theme that directly focuses on these issues, it is seen that some words related to environment and climate are included in various units. In the 6th grade curriculum, in turn, these themes are covered in the 9th unit under the title Saving the Planet, while in the 7th grade they are covered in the 9th unit under the theme Environment and in the 8th grade in the 10th unit under the theme Natural Forces. This shows that the curriculum not only focuses on the key academic objectives of developing language skills, but also has the potential to raise environmental awareness in students.

When the curriculum is analyzed, it can be said that the emphasis in the curriculum on raising awareness about the environment and global issues is not sufficient. Addressing such themes at earlier grade levels would be a critical step in terms of raising environmental awareness. Indeed, the importance of raising environmental awareness at an early age has been recognized internationally since the 1980s, with the Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1980) emphasizing that environmental sensitivity should be developed from an early age, especially towards the learner's own community. In this context, it may be useful to integrate environmental themes into the curriculum at an earlier age and with an interdisciplinary approach. Thus, students' sustainability awareness can be shaped from an early stage and their attitudes towards these issues can develop more positively in the long run. This will contribute to raising more conscious and responsible individuals in the future.

3.2 Analysis of Teaching Materials & Textbooks


At each level, there are two textbooks approved by MEB. One is provided by MEB and the other is provided by private publishers. In addition to those, in Grade 8, there is also a supplementary material prepared by MEB Publications. The analysis of these books in the context of environment and sustainability is presented below.

3.2.1. An Overview of Grade 5 English Textbooks

The Grade 5 English curriculum in Turkey is offered with two different textbooks based on the syllabus published by MEB. These books are published by Pasifik Publications (Birincioglu-

Kaldar, 2024) and MEB Publications (Akseki et al., 2024). These textbooks were developed in accordance with the MEB English Language Teaching Program published in 2018 and both textbooks have the same unit titles (See Table 1).

Table 1. Content of the 5th grade English books

Pasifik Publications	MEB Publications
<p>CONTENTS</p> <p>ORGANISATION CHART7</p> <p>→ UNIT 1- HELLO! 9</p> <p>→ UNIT 2- MY TOWN 21</p> <p>→ UNIT 3- GAMES AND HOBBIES 33</p> <p>→ UNIT 4- MY DAILY ROUTINE 45</p> <p>→ UNIT 5- HEALTH 57</p> <p>→ UNIT 6- MOVIES 69</p> <p>→ UNIT 7- PARTY TIME 81</p> <p>→ UNIT 8- FITNESS 93</p> <p>→ UNIT 9- THE ANIMAL SHELTER 105</p> <p>→ UNIT 10- FESTIVALS 117</p> <p>LET'S PRACTICE 130</p> <p>FLASHCARDS 143</p> <p>WORD LIST 169</p> <p>BIBLIOGRAPHY 176</p>	<p>CONTENTS & CHARACTERS</p> <p>Overview 10</p> <p>1 Hello! 11</p> <p>2 My Town 19</p> <p>3 Games and Hobbies 27</p> <p>4 My Daily Routine 35</p> <p>5 Health 43</p> <p>6 Movies 51</p> <p>7 Party Time 59</p> <p>8 Fitness 67</p> <p>9 The Animal Shelter 75</p> <p>10 Festivals 83</p> <p>Cutouts 91</p> <p>Word List 109</p> <p>Listening Text 116</p> <p>References 120</p> 

The content of the books was analyzed under three main categories. First, the units, sections, and topics that directly included environmental and sustainability themes were analyzed to determine the extent to which these topics were integrated into the textbooks. Second, sample texts, dialogues, reading passages and exercises were analyzed to assess how environmental issues are presented and whether they encourage active engagement with sustainability concepts. Finally, the analysis focused on green vocabulary and the use of environmental concepts to assess the depth of language exposure related to sustainability and ecological awareness. The results of the analysis are presented below in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of the 5th grade textbooks

Criteria	MEB Publications	Pasifik Publications
Unit/ Sections /Topic on Environment and Sustainability	“Eco-friendly hobbies” (p. 27)	There are no specific units or topics directly related to the environment.
Sample Texts, Dialogues, Reading Texts and Exercises	<p>"He likes/loves fishing, hiking, and camping." (p. 29),</p> <p>“Do you like camping?” (p. 30),</p> <p>“What are your eco-friendly hobbies? Make a word cloud infographic for your eco-friendly hobbies. My favorite eco-friendly hobby is cycling. I also love gardening, hiking, and recycling things. I collect cans and plant flowers in them. And on weekends, I go to the beach to clean up the environment. Find out your eco-friendly hobbies (p. 34)”.</p> <p>“1. Do you like being in nature?</p> <p>2. What outdoor sports can you do?</p> <p>3. What are your favorite outdoor activities?” (p. 68)</p> <p>“Let’s go hiking! How about jogging? How about going trekking? Let’s go cycling.” (p. 73)</p>	<p>There is no specific dialogue or text on environment and sustainability.</p>
Green Vocabulary Coverage	Climbing, camping, experiments (p. 31), cycling (p. 32, 68), hiking, camping (p. 68)	In Unit 3, under the theme of Games and Hobbies, and in Unit 9, under the theme of Fitness, activities such as 'cycling' and 'hiking' (p. 34, 94) are mentioned, but they are not directly emphasized in the context of sustainability education and therefore cannot be considered in this context.
Overall Evaluation	It offers richer content on environmental awareness. Includes exercises on recycling, eco-friendly activities and environmental protection.	Environment and sustainability issues are not included. It focuses more on daily conversation and basic language skills.

The results of the comparative analysis revealed that the analyzed textbooks showed significant differences in terms of the level of coverage of environmental and sustainability issues. While the MEB textbook has explicit activities for students related to environmental sustainability, the Pasifik textbook does not directly address these issues. This can be considered as an important difference in terms of the role of the content of textbooks in creating environmental awareness in educational programs. Sterling (2001) argues that environmental education entails much more than merely imparting environmental knowledge. According to Sterling (2001), environmental

education aims to enable students to approach environmental problems in a sensitive and solution-oriented manner and to develop a perspective that will raise their awareness about sustainability. In this context, the environmentally friendly activities presented in the MEB textbook show how environmental education can be concretized in the school curriculum by demonstrating a direct, albeit limited, approach to raising environmental awareness in students.

On the other hand, the absence of direct environmental content in the Pasifik textbook suggests that there are deficiencies in integrating environmental awareness into educational processes. This deficiency contradicts research suggesting that textbooks can be an important tool for environmental awareness (Zahoor & Janjua, 2019). The inclusion of environmental education in EFL course materials plays a critical role in facilitating students' development of ecological literacy (Mliless & Larouz, 2018). UNESCO-UNEP (1995) also emphasized that environmental education needs to be integrated into the whole education system and that it is important to equip individuals with the knowledge, values and skills to address environmental issues. Considering that language teaching materials should not only develop language skills but also increase ecological awareness (Mliless & Larouz, 2018; Zahoor & Janjua, 2019), the lack of environmental content in this textbook is not compatible with a sustainable education approach. Additionally, this lack of content creates a significant gap in terms of Turkey's commitments under Target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015). Target 4.7 envisions that by 2030, all learners will acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to support sustainable development. Considering that Turkey has adopted the 2030 Agenda, it is expected that these gains will be structured gradually and systematically from the earliest stages of the education process. However, the absence of this theme in the Pacific textbook hinders the early establishment of sustainability literacy and leads to a weakening of the commitment to reach all learners expressed in Target 4.7 (United Nations, 2015) at the implementation level. Furthermore, given that Indicator 4.7.1 monitors the level of integration of sustainable development education into the curriculum (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023), this omission indicates that full mainstreaming at the curriculum level has not yet been achieved in the Turkish context.

A more in-depth analysis reveals that in the MEB textbook, environmentally friendly concepts are addressed only in reading and writing skills. Within the scope of reading skills, an informative text is presented for students to explore eco-friendly hobbies (p. 27). There are also reading activities that encourage students to think about nature-related activities. In these activities, activities such as hiking and camping in nature are discussed (p. 29-30), and the task of creating a word cloud infographic highlighting environmentally friendly hobbies enables students to visualize these concepts (p. 34). Writing activities that support reading activities allow students to express their personal views about nature in writing (p. 68, 73). However, the fact that eco-friendly practices are addressed only through specific activities does not indicate that sustainability and environmental awareness are covered in a holistic manner. Evaluating the textbook in terms of its potential for developing ecological literacy requires examining the extent to which environmental education is presented in depth and systematically.

3.2.2 An Overview of Grade 6 English Textbooks and supplementary materials

The 6th grade textbooks approved by the MEB are provided by two different publishing houses, as in the 5th grade level: HECCE Publications (Arda & Onay, 2023) and MEB Publications (Demircan et al., 2019). These textbooks are required to be prepared in accordance with the

curriculum and syllabus determined by the MEB. Therefore, the titles of the units are the same in both textbooks (See Table 3).

Table 3. Content of the 6th grade English books

HECCE Publications	MEB Publications
<p>CONTENTS</p> <p>UNIT 1 LIFE 9</p> <p>UNIT 2 YUMMY BREAKFAST 25</p> <p>UNIT 3 DOWNTOWN 41</p> <p>UNIT 4 WEATHER AND EMOTIONS 57</p> <p>UNIT 5 AT THE FAIR 73</p> <p>UNIT 6 OCCUPATIONS 89</p> <p>UNIT 7 HOLIDAYS 105</p> <p>UNIT 8 BOOKWORMS 121</p> <p>UNIT 9 SAVING THE PLANET 137</p> <p>UNIT 10 DEMOCRACY 153</p> <p>ATTENTION 169</p> <p>WORD LIST 180</p> <p>IRREGULAR VERBS LIST 182</p> <p>BIBLIOGRAPHY 183</p> <p>VISUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY 183</p> <p>LET'S PRACTICE ANSWER KEY 184</p> <p>ATTENTION ANSWER KEY 189</p>	<p>Contents</p> <p>UNIT 1 LIFE 8</p> <p>UNIT 2 YUMMY BREAKFAST 26</p> <p>UNIT 3 DOWNTOWN 46</p> <p>UNIT 4 WEATHER AND EMOTIONS 64</p> <p>UNIT 5 AT THE FAIR 82</p> <p>UNIT 6 OCCUPATIONS 100</p> <p>UNIT 7 HOLIDAYS 120</p> <p>UNIT 8 BOOKWORMS 138</p> <p>UNIT 9 SAVING THE PLANET 158</p> <p>UNIT 10 DEMOCRACY 174</p> <p>CUT OUTS 189</p> <p>ANSWER KEY 191</p> <p>REFERENCES-VISUAL REFERENCES 192</p>

An analysis of the English curriculum and textbooks at the secondary school level in Turkey reveals that there are differences in the way environment and sustainability issues are addressed according to grade level. The content of 6th grade textbooks reveals that Unit 9 under the theme of “Saving the Planet” is specifically devoted to environment and sustainability issues. This stands out as an important difference when compared to the 5th grade textbooks. This is because while this topic is addressed only with limited references in certain units at the 5th grade level, it is included as an independent unit in the 6th grade curriculum.

As in the 5th grade, the 6th grade textbooks were also analyzed by qualitative content analysis method according to predetermined criteria in terms of environment and sustainability and the results obtained are presented in the table below (See Table 4).

Table 4. Analysis of the 6th grade textbooks

Criteria	HECCE Publications	MEB
Unit/ Sections /Topic on Environment and Sustainability	Unit 4 Weather and Emotions Unit 9 Saving the Planet	Unit 9 Saving the Planet
Sample Texts, Dialogues, Reading Texts and Exercises	<p>“Hi from the North Pole. I am a polar bear. I like freezing weather. I feel happy and energetic in cold weather. I like swimming in icy water. My favorite season is winter. I can’t live in hot weather. Please stop the global warming. (p. 66)”, “There is no Planet B (p. 137)”,</p> <p>“Be careful how long you take a shower Use less water and electricity Reducing energy is really cool Unplug the TV when you are not using it Turn off the computer every now and then Throw away litter, pick up trash And save the Earth! (p. 138)”</p>	<p>“Do you put things into the recycling bin? Why? Which materials can we recycle?” (p. 158).</p> <p>“TIP CORNER</p> <p>What should we do to save our world?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We should use less water and electricity. - We shouldn’t harm animals. - We should recycle paper, glass and plastic. - We shouldn’t waste energy. - We should unplug the TV. - We should use wind and solar energy.” (p. 162)
Green Vocabulary Coverage	Global warming (p. 66), Reuse, Reduce, Recycle, Go Green (p. 138), biodegrade (p. 139), not waste food, take care of their environment (p. 162).	Recycle our litter, use public transportation, cycle or walk, protect our environment (p. 162), reduce air pollution, use environmentally friendly products (p. 163)
Overall Evaluation	In the textbook, sustainability principles are introduced in order to raise environmental awareness. The unit “Saving the Planet” focuses on water efficiency, recycling and energy use, while the unit “Weather and Emotions” draws attention to global warming.	The MEB textbook also encourages eco-friendly habits, but lacks in-depth discussion of environmental issues.

Both textbooks aim to promote eco-friendly habits and focus on sustainability issues in the unit titled “Saving the Planet”. The HECCE textbook covers various subtopics related to environmental issues and introduces students to basic sustainability principles such as saving water, recycling, reducing plastic use. In addition, the suggestions that form the basis of the teaching focus on students adopting environmentally friendly behaviors in their daily lives. For example, to prevent wasting water, “Turn the Tap off While Brushing!” (p. 140). Apart from the “Saving the Planet” unit of the HECCE textbook, the only example of environmental awareness is in the “Weather and Emotions” unit. In this unit, a polar bear utters the following statement: “Hi from the North Pole. I am a polar bear. I like freezing weather. I feel happy and energetic in cold weather. I like swimming in icy water. My favorite season is winter. I can’t live in hot weather. Please stop the global warming (Arda & Onay, 2023, p. 66)”. This statement expresses the polar bear's concern about global warming and is followed by a fill in the blanks activity based on it. However, although

weather and emotions are covered together in the “Weather and Emotions” unit, in-depth topics such as the broader effects of global warming and its emotional repercussions on humans, nature or animals are not addressed. At this point, a more detailed discussion of the effects of global warming, especially discussions about its emotional dimensions, could have increased students' awareness of the subject. Yet, it is noteworthy to state that there are no detailed discussions on the environment and sustainability in the MEB textbook, except for the Saving the Planet unit.

The effects of global warming are not limited to environmental changes, but also profoundly affect the emotional experiences of humans and animals. In particular, changes in ecosystems, loss of natural habitats and an increase in extreme weather events as a result of global warming create emotional responses such as anxiety, fear and uncertainty in individuals who directly experience these situations. Growing body of literature show that emotional disorders such as stress, depression and social unrest increase in communities exposed to environmental changes (Clayton et al., 2017; Lawrance et al., 2022). In addition, changes in animal habitats, especially in threatened species, reveal the stress and fear that species experience as they struggle to survive. In this regard, the statement emphasizing the polar bear's anxiety about global warming in the HECCE textbook actually indicates that such emotional effects need to be included more in teaching materials. Addressing the emotional effects of global warming can help students increase their environmental awareness and develop emotional empathy.

The MEB textbook, on the other hand, includes content based on the theme of sustainability, such as energy saving, recycling, water use and protection of natural resources. The emphasis here is similarly on the acquisition of eco-friendly habits. To illustrate, the dialogues between Ali and his family aim to instill in students an awareness of energy conservation, but do not include in-depth discussions on environmental issues.

As for vocabulary and concepts, the green vocabulary used in both textbooks is generally at the beginner level. Concepts such as “reuse”, “reduce”, “recycle” are introduced to students, but these terms are usually presented at a more superficial level. Concepts such as “carbon footprint” and “renewable energy” are not included. This may prevent students from understanding environmental awareness in a broader context.

The HECCE textbook introduces the principles of sustainability, aiming to raise environmental awareness. In the “Saving the Planet” unit, issues such as water efficiency, recycling and energy use are addressed. Moreover, differently from the MEB textbook, the Weather and Emotions unit draws attention to environmental problems such as global warming. The MEB textbook also encourages eco-friendly habits. Issues such as recycling, energy saving and water use are mentioned, but a more comprehensive discussion of environmental issues is missing. Nevertheless, it helps students develop environmentally conscious habits.

3.2.3 An Overview of Grade 7 English Textbooks

The 7th grade English curriculum in Turkey is offered through two different textbooks based on the 2018 English Language Teaching Program determined by the MEB: Yıldırım Publications (Cenk & Gezmiş, 2024) and MEB Publications (Çatlı et al., 2024). Both books were developed in accordance with this program, including the same unit titles. As in the 5th and 6th grade textbooks, the 7th grade textbooks were also analyzed with the qualitative content analysis

method according to predetermined criteria in terms of environment and sustainability and the findings are displayed in the table below (See Table 5).

Table 5. Analysis of the 7th grade textbooks

Criteria	Yıldırım Publications	MEB Publications
Unit/ Sections /Topic on Environment and Sustainability	Unit 4 Wild Animals, Unit 7 Dreams, Unit 9 Environment	Unit 4 Wild Animals, Unit 9 Environment
Sample Texts, Dialogues, Reading Texts and Exercises	<p>“People shouldn’t harm animals’ habitat (p. 54).”,</p> <p>“Are you environmentally friendly?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you have a long shower? 2. Do you often use perfume? 3. Do you use only one side of a paper? 4. Do you leave the lights on when you don’t use? 5. Do you use plastic shopping bags? 6. Do you throw rubbish on the street? 7. Do you harm animals? (p. 108).” 	<p>“What should we do to protect the wild life? (p. 55)”,</p> <p>“Write some suggestions to protect them (p. 60)”. “Do you have recycle bins at your school? What can you do to save electric energy? (p. 108)” “Ecology is very important for all living beings. People have a big effect on ecosystem. Their wrong habits cause pollution, climate change, deforestation and extinction of animals. All these come together and the Earth faces global warming. Global warming is very dangerous because the Earth is getting warmer (p. 109).”</p>
Green Vocabulary Coverage	Endangered and extinct animals, pollution, (p. 53), water shortage, climate change, hunger, cars running with water (p. 88), pollution (p. 92, 93),waste of water, extinction, pollution, drought, pesticides (p. 108)	use eco-friendly products, protect their habitat, plant trees (p. 55), renewable resources, air pollution, recycle bins (p. 109)
Overall Evaluation	Compared to the MEB textbook more environmental terms are presented in this textbook.	The MEB textbook includes more practical suggestions compared to Yıldırım textbook.











Grade 7 English textbooks, similar to Grade 6 textbooks, include the themes of environment and sustainability. In the curriculum determined by MEB, the “Environment” and “Wild Animals” units are directly related to these topics. However, when the content analysis of the books is analyzed, it is seen that the emphasis on the environment differs according to the publishing house.

Upon a closer examination of the textbooks prepared by MEB and Yıldırım Publications, it was found that Yıldırım Publications covered environmental and sustainability issues more. While environmental issues are limited to certain units in the curriculum published by MEB, Yıldırım Publications not only covers this topic in the “Environment” and “Wild Animals” units, but also in the “Dreams” chapter. Both books aim to raise students' awareness of the environment and sustainability. However, Yıldırım Publications emphasizes more on environmental issues, whereas, in the MEB book, these contents are limited to certain chapters. In order to provide students with more comprehensive environmental awareness, it may be useful to include more of these topics in different units.

3.2.4 An Overview of Grade 8 English Textbooks

The 8th grade English textbooks, as in the other levels, were prepared based on the 2018 English Language Teaching Program determined by MEB and are offered through two different sources: Bilim ve Kültür Publications (Tan, 2024) and MEB Publications (İlter et al., 2022). Both textbooks were developed to include the same unit titles in accordance with the program (See Table 6).

Table 6. Content of the 8th grade English books

Bilim ve Kültür Publications		MEB Publications			
CONTENTS		CONTENTS			
ORGANIZATION PAGE	7				
ICONS USED IN THE BOOK	8				
UNIT 1 FRIENDSHIP EXERCISES	9 19	 1 FRIENDSHIP P11	LISTENING • Activities with friends • Kind of movies	SPEAKING • Activities with your friends • Kind of movies • Responding to an offer	
UNIT 2 TEEN LIFE EXERCISES	25 35	 2 TEEN LIFE P23	• Preferences of music types • Book preferences of two friends	• Type of music • Regular activities • Daily activities	
UNIT 3 IN THE KITCHEN EXERCISES	41 51	 3 IN THE KITCHEN P35	• Preferences about different cuisine • Ingredients of two desserts	• Different cuisine preferences • Process of a fruit salad	
UNIT 4 ON THE PHONE EXERCISES	57 67	 4 ON THE PHONE P47	• A video chat of a mother with her daughter • Different types of phone conversations	• Expressing a decision taken at the moment of conversation • Making a phone call • Discussing about advantages and disadvantages of phones	
UNIT 5 THE INTERNET EXERCISES	73 83	 5 THE INTERNET P59	• Purposes of using the Internet • A well-known vlogger	• Exchange information about the Internet • Internet habits of a family • Responding to an offer	
UNIT 6 ADVENTURES EXERCISES	88 98	 6 ADVENTURES P71	• A radio programme about risky jobs • Extreme sports and their equipment	• Compare the sports • Your preferences about extreme sports • A conversation about adventurers	
UNIT 7 TOURISM EXERCISES	105 115	 7 TOURISM P83	• A brief information about three destinations • An advertisement of two famous tourist destinations	• Type of places you prefer • Your vacation experiences • Details of your favorite tourist attractions • A comparison about tourist attractions	
UNIT 8 CHORES EXERCISES	121 131	 8 CHORES P95	• Sharing responsibilities of four people • Responsibilities of two university students	• Obligations/ likes/ dislikes at your home • A dialogue about duties • Your ideas about sharing chores in a family	
UNIT 9 SCIENCE EXERCISES	137 147	 9 SCIENCE P107	• A visit to a science museum • Women Inventors in History	• Your ideas about scientific achievements • A discussion about scientific achievements • Scientific actions happening currently and in the past	
UNIT 10 NATURAL FORCES EXERCISES	153 163	 10 NATURAL FORCES P119	• A news about natural forces and disasters • A breaking news about flood	• Your predictions about natural forces and disaster • Reasons and results of natural forces affecting the future of the Earth	
GLOSSARY	168				
BIBLIOGRAPHY	171				
VISUALS	172				
ANSWER KEY	172				

Upon a closer examination of the table of contents of Bilim ve Kültür Publications, it is observed that the book consists of 10 main units and each unit is followed by related exercises. The thematic distribution of the units is as follows: “Friendship”, “Teen Life”, “In the Kitchen”, “On the Phone”, “The Internet”, “Adventures”, “Tourism”, “Chores”, “Science” and “Natural Forces”. The book presents the units only at the title level and does not include detailed information about the content.

On the other hand, in the English textbook prepared by MEB Publications, the units are organized under 10 main headings and same themes are covered. However, in this publication, not only the title of each unit is indicated, but also how it is supported by listening and speaking activities. In the table of contents section of the book, the skills that each unit focuses on are explained in detail. For example, in the “Natural Forces” unit, listening activities include learning about natural forces and listening to news reports about them. In the speaking section, it is stated

that skills such as making discussions on natural disasters and their effects, evaluating the measures that can be taken against disasters and exchanging ideas on these issues are developed.

In line with this comparison, it can be said that the content of Bilim ve Kültür Publications' book is presented in a more general framework, whereas MEB Publications' book provides detailed information on how each unit is associated with language skills. While the MEB textbook deals with the language teaching process in a structured way, the Bilim ve Kültür Publishing book presents a structure that lists topics and exercises. This reveals that the MEB book is more of a guide in the teaching process and shows more clearly how to achieve certain outcomes for teachers and students.

Following the other levels, Grade 8 textbooks were analyzed in terms of environment and sustainability according to predetermined criteria using qualitative content analysis method and the findings are shown in the table below (See Table 7).

Table 7. Analysis of the 8th grade textbooks

Criteria	Bilim ve Kültür Publications	MEB Publications
Unit/ Sections /Topic on Environment and Sustainability	Unit 10 Natural Forces	Unit 7 Tourism Unit 10 Natural Forces
Sample Texts, Dialogues, Reading Texts and Exercises	<p>“1. Scientists are extremely interested in climate changes. 2. Our planet isn't warming up. 3. Droughts, avalanches, floods and so on are all ecological disasters.”, “...We should stop wasting water sources...”, “I think we'll have water shortages in the future because we waste too much water. I guess we should take serious precautions (p. 155).”</p>	<p>“Firstly, our tour guide informed us about the place, ecosystem and the wild life of the National Park (p. 91).”, “safer environment, cheaper energy resource! (p. 114)”, “I think there'll be erosion because we destroy forests. So many animals and plants will extinct in the future (p. 120).”</p>
Green Vocabulary Coverage	Global warming (p. 155), climate change (p. 157), earthquake, drought, landslide, tsunami, hurricane, tornado, avalanche, water shortage (p. 161), wildfires, forest degradation, air pollution, destruction of watersheds, ecosystem (p. 162)	Solar panel system (p. 114), drought, hurricane, earthquake, tsunami, landslide, volcano (p. 120), global warming, melting of glaciers, extinction, climate (p. 121), deforestation (p. 123), eco-friendly, recycle, rechargeable batteries, renewable energy (p. 125)
Overall Evaluation	The textbook contains more scientific information than the MEB Publications' textbook, but does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive framework from a sustainability perspective.	The textbook devotes more space to environmental issues than the Bilim ve Kültür Publications' textbook, providing students with the opportunity to generate solutions.

In both books, the units that directly or indirectly address environment and sustainability issues were identified and analyzed. It is seen that both books address environmental issues such as natural disasters, especially in Unit 10: Natural Forces, as per the curriculum published by MEB. Apart from this, there are sections in different units that indirectly touch upon the concept of sustainability. However, it was found that the direct coverage of these issues was limited. For example, in the textbook of Bilim ve Kültür Publications, the word safari is mentioned only once

in the context of tourist attraction. This usage does not include a direct environmental or ecological emphasis and is presented only as a touristic activity. On the other hand, in the textbook of MEB Publications, the word safari is used only once in the context of tourist attraction. On the other hand, in the textbook of MEB Publications, the word safari is mentioned once again. However, in this context, it is not only presented as a touristic activity, but also as a trip to a national park and associated with elements such as the ecosystem and wild nature there.

Overall, the coverage of environmental issues in the MEB textbook is broader than in the Bilim Kültür Publishing textbook. The book offers students a solution-oriented approach and aims to raise awareness about environmental problems. For example, the chapters on natural forces provide information on measures that can be taken at the individual and societal level. In addition, while addressing the effects of natural disasters on the ecosystem, suggestions for the protection of nature are presented. On the other hand, the Bilim Kültür Publications' book adopts a more scientific perspective. While explaining environmental concepts, academic language is used and cause-effect relationships of natural phenomena are emphasized. However, it is seen that the activities and solution suggestions that will provide students with an active role in the context of sustainability are limited. It can be concluded that although both books provide important content to develop environmental awareness, the MEB book allocates more space to environmental issues and gives students the opportunity to produce solutions. In order to provide more detailed and multidimensional coverage of environmental and sustainability issues, it is recommended that both books be supplemented with additional materials emphasizing individual and social responsibilities.

It is worth noting that MEB published an English textbook as a supplementary material in 2022 (Demircan et al., 2022), and it was observed that the environment and sustainability issues were covered in this material within the scope of the Natural Forces unit as per the MEB's curriculum. It was also revealed that the vocabulary and activities in this supplementary material were very similar to the content of the textbook published by the MEB.

3.3 Patterns of Sustainability Integration: A Comparative Discussion

The findings from grades 5–8 are presented in a comparative manner in the table below. This comprehensive presentation allows for an evaluation of the position of the sustainability theme within the curriculum in terms of distribution across grades and continuity. When the positioning of the content, thematic intensity, and conceptual framework are considered together, Table 8 shows in which grade levels the sustainability theme is concentrated and how it is framed.

Table 8. Patterns of sustainability integration across grades 5–8

Grade	Publisher	Curricular Position	Sustainability Framing	Conceptual Orientation
5	MEB	Embedded, no dedicated unit	Implicit	Nature appreciation; limited sustainability discourse
5	Pasifik	Absent	—	No identifiable sustainability focus
6	HECCE	2 units	Explicit but awareness-level	Recycling and conservation practices
6	MEB	1 unit	Explicit; behavior-oriented	Daily environmental responsibility
7	Yıldırım	3 units	Explicit	Problem-oriented and awareness-driven environmental discourse

7	MEB	2 units	Explicit	Responsibility- and solution-oriented environmental discourse
8	Bilim ve Kültür	1 unit	Explicit but descriptive	Scientific explanation of environmental phenomena
8	MEB	2 units	Explicit; partially solution-oriented	Environmental systems and renewable energy

Table 8 demonstrates that sustainability and environmental themes vary across grade levels but generally follow a unit-based structure. At the 5th grade level, it is noteworthy that sustainability content is either implicitly presented (MEB) or entirely absent (Pasifik). This indicates that the theme of environmental sustainability is not addressed within a clear and structured framework at the early grade levels. In the 6th grade, environmental-themed units are explicitly included in both publishers' materials; however, the content is primarily designed to raise awareness and encourage daily environmentally friendly behaviors. When it comes to the 7th grade level, the thematic scope broadens. Environmental issues, wildlife, and individual responsibility are addressed more clearly. However, at this level too, the content is largely presented within a problem-focused and behavior-oriented framework. In 8th grade, in turn, the conceptual and scientific dimensions of environmental content increase. Topics such as climate change, natural disasters, renewable energy, and environmental systems are addressed more explicitly. Nevertheless, there is no clear continuity in terms of sustainability being structured within a gradual and holistic development model across grade levels. Overall, sustainability integration is not spread horizontally across the curriculum but is rather embedded within specific units.

The findings presented in this study indicate that the theme of sustainability is positioned in a limited and mostly unit-based structure in secondary school English textbooks. In particular, the implicit or weak foundation of the theme at the early grade level indicates that the integration of sustainability does not exhibit a systematic distribution across the curriculum. This situation largely aligns with the findings reported in the national literature. Arslan and Curle (2021) state that although sustainable development goals are included in the English teaching program in Turkey, these goals are emphasized more at the cognitive achievement level, while socio-emotional and behavioral competencies remain relatively limited. This finding parallels the current study, particularly at the 6th and 7th grade levels, where sustainability is predominantly presented in the context of awareness raising and individual behavioral recommendations.

Similarly, Civan-Artur and Cesur's (2025) study, which examined 5th to 8th grade EFL textbooks based on eco-pedagogical criteria, revealed that only 111 of a total of 893 activities met at least one eco-pedagogical criterion. Moreover, the textbook with the lowest level of eco-pedagogical activities was found to be the 5th grade level. This finding directly corresponds with the observations in the current study that the theme of sustainability is either implicitly addressed or not addressed at all at the 5th grade level. Therefore, the national literature supports the findings that the integration of sustainability is weakly grounded at the early grade levels.

When compared with the international literature, the findings reveal similar trends indicating that the sustainable development theme is addressed with limited scope and depth in most contexts within language teaching materials. For example, Mohammadnia and Moghadam (2019) examined a series of EFL textbooks used in Iran in terms of the fundamental values and principles of sustainability. Drawing attention to the pedagogical orienting role of textbooks in the classroom, they emphasized that the theme of sustainability may not gain visibility in the teaching process

when these principles are not explicitly structured. The authors note that the existing content needs to be aligned with sustainability principles in a more consistent and systematic manner. This conclusion aligns with the findings of the present study, which found that sustainability content is concentrated in specific units.

Similarly, Veszelinov's (2024) study, which evaluates an advanced EFL textbook and workbook commonly used in the Hungarian context using quantitative content analysis methods, reveals that the material is limited in terms of meeting environmental education objectives. This result shows that the mere presence of the sustainability theme is not sufficient. Instead, the dimensions of scope, distribution, and pedagogical depth are also decisive. In another study, Martínez-Medina and Arrebola (2019), who examined sustainability activities in Spanish elementary school textbooks in terms of cognitive complexity, report that a significant portion of the activities are concentrated at a low cognitive level and that sub-themes are mostly addressed within a narrow thematic focus, such as environmental problems and recycling. This finding suggests that sustainability can be structured around behavioral recommendations and limited problem themes in some contexts.

In this regard, the findings of the present study largely correspond with trends reported in the existing literature. Research conducted across different contexts shows that the theme of sustainability is often limited in scope within language teaching materials, structured around specific thematic focuses, and predominantly framed within an awareness- or behavior-oriented approach. Similarly, this study also found that sustainability content is mostly concentrated within specific units and does not exhibit a gradual structure across grade levels. In this regard, it is necessary to go beyond the content addition approach to sustainability integration and to address it with a design approach that relates it more holistically to the structural components of the curriculum and considers developmental continuity across grade levels. The findings suggest that structuring sustainability within a more systematic and gradual framework in the context of language teaching would be pedagogically meaningful.

3.4 Practical and Pedagogical Implications for Curriculum Design

The findings of this study indicate that addressing the theme of sustainability in a limited and unsystematic manner within the curriculum prevents students from establishing regular and meaningful engagement with environmental concepts. However, Target 4.7 under SDG 4 aims to ensure that all learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to support sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). To achieve this target pedagogically, it is not sufficient to address sustainability solely through individual units. There is a need for practices that ensure students are continuously exposed to this theme and for a spiral curriculum approach. The spiral curriculum concept envisages that certain concepts are revisited at different grade levels with increasing cognitive and linguistic complexity (Bruner, 1960). This requires that the theme of sustainability be presented in a recurring and deepening structure throughout the teaching process, rather than being confined to a specific unit. Therefore, it is critically important to observe the principles of continuity and progression in curriculum design. Within this framework, it is possible to introduce the theme of sustainability at the 5th grade level with basic concepts and vocabulary, and then deepen it in subsequent grades with cause-and-effect relationships, problem-solving structures, and discussion-based tasks. Additionally, practical applications such as speaking tasks,

project-based mini-studies, and interdisciplinary activities can create an integrated structure between language learning and sustainability education by enabling students to interact with environmental concepts in a regular and meaningful way. Such a gradual and continuous approach will contribute to the pedagogically more effective support of the knowledge and skill acquisition outlined in Target 4.7.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the extent to which the themes of environment and sustainability are included in the English curricula implemented at the secondary school level in Turkey. The general structure of the curriculum and the content of the textbooks were analyzed comparatively. The findings revealed that the English curriculum is based on pedagogical principles such as communicative competence, problem-solving skills, and authentic learning environments and has a structure that can indirectly support environmental themes. However, the content of the textbooks does not adequately reflect this vision. The absence of themes related to sustainability or the environment, especially in the 5th grade textbooks, weakens the pedagogical integrity in this area. In the 6th, 7th and 8th grade books, these themes are limited to only one unit each, limiting students' ability to develop environmental awareness at an early age.

In conclusion, it can be argued that there is a significant discrepancy between the values and skills stipulated in the English curriculum and the content presented in the textbooks. For the holistic integration of sustainability education into language teaching, structural improvements are needed not only at the curricular level but also at the level of teaching materials. This necessitates earlier and more systematic integration of environmental themes into students' language learning processes.

Ethical Statements

The current study does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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