The role of bioethics on sustainability of environmental education

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Abstract

While efforts used to be exerted to develop regulatory-fixing tools in order to find solutions for environmental problems in the beginning, collective solutions are now sought as people figured out the global nature of the effects caused by the problem. Despite the fact that people keep on trying to solve the issue by means of science and technology, the main focus has shifted towards implementation of individual-oriented socio-economic, political and intellectual tools. One of the most important tools developed in this field is “environmental education”. Environmental education which aims at showing human not as the only main element of the nature but as a part of the process in harmony with other pieces is developing some guiding tools in formulating common concerns for humanity and sharing the responsibilities, by virtue of which it becomes a part of the solution in global scale by shouldering some roles in transformation of systems and changing production and consumption behaviors. Bioethics, which can be classified as a branch of ethics, proclaims itself to assume key roles to develop and implement relevant tools.

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1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate the role and the prominence of bioethics on sustainability of environmental education and define respective tools. The method allows for the comparison of good and bad sustainability practices in terms of environmental education and the use - performance analysis of bioethics tools.

Compared to the term nature, the environment – a sum of all external factors having an impact on living creatures – gives rise to a negative impact on our subconscious especially due to pressure the humankind put on these factors.

People are struggling to come up with a solution for their problems since production-consumption balance changed in characteristics and reached its limit of bearing capacity following the achievement of industrial revolution even though the mankind were able to find a solution for their problems or cope with them in the past. The development of agriculture led to social unions and thus to environmental destruction. It would, however, be wrong to hold the capitalist eco-historical period separate from pre-capitalism period through the perils of
environmental destruction or ecological breakdown since societies transitioning to agriculture prior to the achievement of industrial society had ecological and social breakdowns as well due to the excessiveness. In addition, these societies were not able to ecologically accord with the nature (infant deaths, undernourishment, epidemic diseases, hunger and short life spans were quite common back then). Sumerian, Mayan and Roman Civilizations are some fine examples unearthing how vulnerable the essentially agricultural societies reaching their ecological limits, are against the ecological breakdowns.

When we take a closer look at the Mercantilism – the pioneer of the Capitalist system which is the economic equivalent of environmental breakdowns - in terms of ecology, it is clear that now it is a time not for negative alteration but for a transformation and seizure of ecological systems. It can be said that what brought the world to the brink of an ecological disaster is not the increasing population but the development of an economic system which values economic growth and profitability above all (Foster, 1999).

Environmental problems such as climate change, desertification, wasting issues, deforestation and extinction of species are key elements for the development of this negative impact reaching to a global scale and turning into a common concern for the whole mankind and other lives. At this stage of our study, we would rather focus on human motives which are the origin of the problem, instead of current negative impacts of these problems. The major trigger for the excessive consumption accelerating the environmental pollution is today conditioning the excessive stimulation and satisfaction of human instincts and desires. Researches and identifications in environmental sciences, therefore, have very limited impact on the environmental protection since they are not devoted to controlling of polluting and detrimental actions and passions of people. Environment is a multivariate phenomenon. When we consider the fact that social, cultural and economic structures are in a chain interaction on dimensions ranging from individual to global, it can be said that social processes developing from past to present underlie the individual and mass movements on environmental culture.

2. Sustainability of Environmental Education

It is possible to cite from Richard Dawkins that the sustainability is not a natural sense in human nature and thus the emerging process of selfishness and competition conditions in a consumption society can be analyzed in terms of evolution (Dawkins, 1986). According to him, the constantly consuming mankind cause incredible destructions in the environment and now look for the ways to minimize this impact. People will either decrease in population or increase the efficiency in technology or change their lifestyles. It can be said that there are some efforts to improve the efficiency in technology for the sake of finding a solution for the population but the change is not there yet. Unfair use can be said to be the reason. It can be asserted that the basic solution would be a change in lifestyles and consumption trends of people. It should be pointed out that various consumption models sensitive to the environment include some solutions for the world but could not reach to a level where it would constitute a radical change around the world. Large companies, governments, media and even halting points (selfish individual, competition environment etc.) of the education system are the ones to blame for. Now people are in quest of collective solutions following the recognition of global impacts of the problem whereas some regulative-corrective means had been developed in the beginning with a view to finding a solution for environmental problems. The focal point is shifted to the introduction of socio-economic, political and intellectual means grounding on science and technology even though now people continue to find a solution for their problems thanks to the science and technology.

Directors and companies need to reach to a level of awareness for a solution through a little bit of courage and responsibility in order to come up with a radical and sustainable solution for environmental problems. The main emphasis is on the sustainability which can compose not a poverty-stricken world but a world rich and fair in various aspects (ethical, religious, participative, cooperative) (Jackson, 2009).
2.1. Environmental education

The lack of motivation to get us going with a view to implementing solutions underlies the origin of the almost all above mentioned solutions. One of the most important means developed to overcome this problem is 'environmental education'. The education – in the processes of development and production – is the main factor serving for goals of efficient utilization of substance, energy resources and economic potential, sustainable development, clean environment and healthy life. Environmental education, on the other hand, can be defined as raising awareness for environment, achievement of attitudes friendly to environment, positive and lasting, and protection of natural, historical, cultural, socio-aesthetic values, active participation and taking responsibility for the solution of the problems.

Environmental education is a process one needs to have and put into practice from birth till death. Aiming to mirror people as a part of the process in accord with the all parts, not as the sole main factor, the environmental education develops guiding means in composing common concerns of people and sharing of responsibilities. It plays major roles in the transformation of systems and fate perception and the alteration of production-consumption trends.

Despite the goals set by the environmental education, the means to put it into practice are unfortunately still unsatisfactory and the impact of the education is not sustainable. The main reason for that is the fact that the means utilized in this regard are not addressing the issues of all mankind as there is a lack of common values in perspective to solve the problems and there is no sense of responsibility or internalization of the problem. The means such as social media, communication, educational technologies and environmental economy can be said to be efficient nowadays whereas these means and formal, non-formal and in-service training techniques for environmental education lack in creating a sense of responsibility and motivation. The major setback in this regard is that these means get under way before responding to the question ‘why’ in the beginning.

2.2. Relationships between ethics, bioethics and environmental ethics

‘Bioethics’ as a reflection of philosophical ethics in applied ethics or ‘Environmental Ethics’ come into the picture. Bioethics, which can be classified as a branch of the ethics plays a key role in the development and implementation of the respective means.

Unlike the laws, the ethics does not encapsulate written and final provisions. It depends on the changing conditions, social requirements and scientific developments. The main determinants such as ‘being good’, ‘no malefaction’ and ‘fairness’ remain intact. It would be useful to take a look at the origin of ethics before proceeding with the environmental ethics. People begin to question themselves at first with a view to controlling social structures which get more complicated within themselves. The mankind have looked for the answers to the questions such as ‘who I am’ and ‘why I exist’ and lay the foundation for the discipline called philosophy. The philosophy has enabled philosophers comprehend the human and the nature increasing the number of questions to be asked and adapt the answers in accordance with their own thoughts and that has brought various results to various societies. Each society forms its own level of awareness-perception as a common awareness in the essence of the person globally comes into shape as well. It is unknown whether there was concepts such as good or bad in primitive societies and what kind of concept it was if any but the mankind have put these concepts into practice with a view to having a hold on the society as a result of transition to civilization. People, therefore, utilize philosophy and distinguish themselves from other and non-living creatures and keep social order by developing a sense of responsibility and some unwritten rules for the sake of social welfare and continuity of its future. This is where the concept of ethics originates in the sense of responsibility. The ethics differs from the morals in that it is universal encapsulating future generations as well (Keleş & Ertan, 2002).
As for the environmental ethics, people begin to question themselves in their perspective to the environment following the dramatic influence of environmental problems on people who actually are the origin of this problem. The ‘environment’ is usually regarded, according to anthropocentric approach, as a blessing put into service for people. Sharing of this blessing and the meanings attributed to components in the environment vary but none of them is regarded more valuable than or on a par with human. The focal point is rather on 'things to do in terms of environment for the healthier continuity of human generation’ even though some egocentric views, which considered at least as valuable as the people are, come into sight in environmental components (all kind of living and non-living creatures) in recent years.

Problems caused by many concepts put into practice in time necessitate calculus of probabilities. That the ethics steers anticipations will result in people having a higher level of sense and dynamics (Çobanoğlu, 2009). In addition to all this, the bioethics expands the scope of ethics encapsulating all the problems, questions and non-living creatures into process, and steering them into all kinds of living forms.

2.2.1. The role of bioethics on sustainability of environmental education

The bioethics incorporates questions – into environmental education - such as why we need to protect the environment, what if species becomes extinct, what the respect to nature means or whether we can both utilize and protect it at the same time, and paves the way for right to life and exist for all living forms including human, and thus playing a huge role in the provision of sustainability not only for human but also for the nature.

Some examples can be helpful in identifying the point where the bioethics differs from current environmental education means and in its contribution to the sustainability of newly developed means. For instance, the traditional education of environment deals with the environmental problems following the dehydration of a wetland whereas the bioethics retraces the origin of the problem and addresses the process in ecosphere dimension. For a different instance, we can analyze the subject of ‘a polar bear is sliding on a piece of ice’ which is something common in traditional education of environment and considered as a mascot for global warming. The message to put stress on is that we need to alter our trends of consumption and protect both this species and the glacier ecosystems which are the living spaces for the species. The fundamental setback ongoing for years now is the non-inclusion of bioethics course into the message. If the question as to why we need to protect this species and respective living space was included in the message, people of all ages would blame themselves for the origin of the problem and then take action with a sense of responsibility as well as solely paying respect. In a similar vein, the bioethics get to the heart of the discourse ‘turn off the electrical devices when not in use’ which is recommended for the traditional education of environment in the methods of individual fight against the global warming, and sets the stage for the internalization of this process by the person in terms of his actions. It, in addition, incorporates these above mentioned methods into the means for traditional education of environment, and gets through to social media, communication, technology, economy, religion, law and society regardless of age, and safeguards the sustainability of the education.

3. Results

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the bioethics – through its question to the respective process concerning the environmental education – steps in the lacking parts of the environmental education such as self-awareness and developing a sense of responsibility, and plays a key role in solutions and researches pertaining to environmental problems, and in attaining a sustainable result for the all ongoing studies (religious, economic, social, political, technological, legal etc.).
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