

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL PEDAGOGY AND HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY

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Citation:

Büyükboyacı, Şengül. (2025). The Conception of Nature in Turkish Village Institutes: a Pedagogy of Productivity or Ecological Awareness? *Pedagogy and Education Management Review*, (2(20), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.36690/2733-2039-2025-2-4-15>

Received: June 03, 2025

Approved: June 29, 2025

Published: June 30, 2025



This article is the expanded version of the paper presented in abstract form at the CEOSSC 2025 Congress, held in Portalegre, Portugal, 13-15 June 2025

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Abstract. This study examines the historical, ideological, and conceptual foundations of the pedagogical relationship established with nature in the Village Institutes and discusses its implications for contemporary environmental education policies. The analysis, centered on the case of Hasanoğlu Village Institute, reveals that nature was positioned not as a subject of education but rather as a functional element serving production and development goals. Nature was predominantly represented through concepts such as “efficiency,” “labor,” “productivity,” and “planning,” while aspects such as observation, intuition, empathy, and aesthetic awareness were marginalized. The research was conducted using a qualitative historical document analysis method. The primary sources include the Village Institutes Law No. 3803, scholarly studies on the Hasanoğlu Higher Village Institute, instructional programs of the period, as well as UNESCO environmental education documents (Belgrade Charter, 1975; Tbilisi Declaration, 1978). In addition, recent environmental education literature was utilized for comparative evaluation. Findings indicate that the developmental and instrumental perception of nature rooted in early Republican educational ideology persists in today’s curricula in transformed forms. Environmental education remains largely confined to technical objectives such as resource management, energy efficiency, and consumption control. Similarly, teacher education programs tend to neglect intuitive, ethical, and emotional dimensions of the human–nature relationship. The study concludes that environmental education should be reconstructed based on multidimensional and holistic pedagogical approaches, positioning nature not merely as an object of knowledge but as a central partner in learning.

Keywords: Village Institutes; environmental education; nature and pedagogy; developmental education; Hasanoğlu Village Institute.

JEL Classification: A20, C20, I18

Formulas: 0; fig.2; tabl.1; bibl. 34

Introduction. The Village Institutes, which played a historically significant role in shaping the Turkish education system, were not merely a teacher training model but a holistic project designed with the aims of rural development, production, and social transformation. Through these institutions, it was intended to redefine the relationship between humans and nature via education; however, the nature of this relationship was predominantly framed within the principles of “productivity” and “development.” The example of the Hasanoğlu Village Institute, in particular, demonstrates how an instrumental approach towards nature was institutionalised both through official regulations and practical applications.

The modernisation and development ideology dominant in the early Republican period did not view nature as an obstacle to civilisation, but rather as an element to be cultivated, transformed, and integrated into the production process. This approach defined the fundamental framework of the relationship forged between education and nature within the Village Institutes; students’ interaction with nature was shaped less by aesthetic, ethical, or intuitive dimensions than by productive and technical functions. Indeed, the fact that Law No. 3803 on the Village Institutes assigned graduate teachers the task of establishing “model fields, vineyards, orchards, and workshops” clearly illustrates how nature was instrumentalised within the pedagogical process. Similarly, curriculum analyses reveal that a significant proportion of lessons was devoted to agricultural and technical practices (Baş & Ercan, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate, in the light of historical documents, curricula, and academic analyses, the meanings attributed to nature in the Village Institutes, particularly through the example of Hasanoğlu; to discuss the pedagogical consequences of these meanings; and to examine their reflections in contemporary environmental education. At the same time, the study questions the historical reasons for the absence of an ethical and aesthetic relationship with nature—emphasised in the environmental education literature—and explores how this gap persists in current educational practices (Sterling, 2001; Gülersoy et al., 2020; Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025).

In this respect, the study not only provides a historical analysis but also seeks to re-evaluate the pedagogical legacy of the past as a means of constructing an environmentally sensitive, critical, and ethically grounded approach to education. Another central claim is to reveal the extent to which the objective of “establishing a conscious and responsible relationship with the environment,” emphasised in UNESCO’s framework documents on environmental education (Belgrade Charter, 1975; Tbilisi Declaration, 1978), overlapped with—or conflicted with—the pedagogical tradition of the Village Institutes.

Literature review. Although the Village Institutes were designed as a multidimensional project aiming at social transformation through education, the relationship they established with nature was largely confined to the principles of productivity and development. In central institutions such as the Hasanoğlu Village Institute, nature was not defined as an entity to be observed, sensed, or experienced through an inner bond, but rather as a resource to be cultivated, transformed, and utilised for yield. This instrumental understanding of nature became evident both in curricula and in practice, while students’ potential to develop ethical, aesthetic, and ontological awareness towards nature was largely neglected (Baş & Ercan, 2023; Yıldız & Akandere, 2017).

Today, environmental education does not merely entail the transmission of knowledge but also seeks to foster affective, value-based, and ethical approaches to nature. However, the fact that content relating to the environment in the Turkish education system is often confined to themes such as technical responsibility, individual frugality, and resource management indicates that the historically constructed instrumental pedagogy continues to persist (Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025; Gülersoy et al., 2020). For this reason, the conceptualisation of nature as embodied in the Village Institutes requires critical re-examination.

Aims. The primary aim of this study is to examine the historical and conceptual foundations of the pedagogical relationship with nature in the Village Institutes, to reveal how this relationship was reflected in educational practices, and to discuss its influence on contemporary environmental education. Through document analysis and pedagogical content examination carried out specifically in the case of the Hasanoğlu Village Institute, the study seeks to uncover the transformation and continuity of the meanings attributed to nature.

Furthermore, the study engages in a comparative discussion of UNESCO's environmental education declarations (1975 Belgrade, 1978 Tbilisi) and Sterling's (2001) approach to sustainable education, thereby assessing the legacy of historical pedagogical models that may have been consciously or unconsciously transferred to the current education system.

Methodology. This research is based on the qualitative method of historical document analysis. Within the scope of the study, Law No. 3803 on the Village Institutes, academic studies on the Hasanoğlu Higher Village Institute (Altunya & Kınacı, 2018; Baş & Ercan, 2023), the curricula of the period, and relevant official documents were taken as primary sources.

Descriptive content analysis was employed in the analysis of the data; concepts concerning nature were categorised under thematic headings. Through this classification, how nature was represented in education throughout the historical process and what these representations meant in the pedagogical context were interpreted.

In addition, by means of comparative analysis, similarities and divergences between historical practices and conceptual frameworks in the environmental education literature—such as those of UNESCO (1978), Sterling (2001), and Sobel (2004)—were examined.

The Historical Outlook on the Perception of Nature in the Village Institutes. The Village Institutes emerged as one of the most radical educational initiatives of the early Republic, aiming to build a pedagogical bridge between the individual and nature in the context of rural development. Yet this bridge was established by instrumentalising nature within the developmentalist ideology of the period, framing it as a field of production and discipline. One of the most visible examples of this approach was Hasanoğlu. In the literature, Hasanoğlu is referred to as the “symbol of the Village Institutes”; with the establishment of the Higher Village Institute, “all institutes began to be entrusted to teachers trained at Hasanoğlu” (Gökdemir, 2019).

The legal and programmatic framework reveals the institutional basis of this instrumentalisation. Law No. 3803 assigned village teachers the responsibility of establishing “model fields, vineyards, orchards, and workshops,” thereby defining the relationship between education and nature in terms of production and productivity

(TBMM, 1940). Curriculum analyses similarly show that lesson hours were heavily weighted towards agricultural and technical activities (Baş & Ercan, 2023). The Higher Village Institute at Hasanoğlan has been conceptualised as “one of the first examples of people’s universities” (Gökdemir, 2019); this central position contributed to the establishment of a pedagogical discourse on nature framed through work and practice.

This approach was also embodied in everyday practices. At the institutes, the day began with music and dance; following morning cleaning, male and female students exercised in the schoolyard through folk dances, and then had breakfast with produce they had cultivated themselves. The day continued with a “Free Reading Hour,” during which students read and discussed an average of twenty-five classical works per year (Yüksel, 2009). Cultural subjects were allocated 22 hours per week (Turkish, mathematics, science, history, foreign language, etc.); agricultural courses 11 hours (farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, fishing, beekeeping, etc.); and technical subjects another 11 hours (blacksmithing, carpentry, tailoring, weaving, etc.) (Makal, 2009; Toprak, 2008; Burgaç, 2009). Thus, agriculture and technical fields were positioned not only as lessons but also as tools of direct contribution to production and social development. Students produced their own desks, uniforms, and school furniture, and they pioneered afforestation, irrigation, and animal husbandry projects in villages (Serter, 2007; Makal, 2009).

At the international level, alternative approaches emerged concurrently. Dewey’s experiential understanding of education (Dewey, 1938) and Sobel’s place-based learning approach (Sobel, 2004) considered direct engagement with nature as a prerequisite for holistic learning. In contrast, students in the Village Institutes were directed less towards observing nature than towards transforming it. The competency of “establishing an empathetic relationship with the environment,” emphasised in UNESCO’s Tbilisi Declaration, remained secondary in this model (UNESCO, 1978).

The historical context of this production-oriented discourse is understandable: the new Republic sought to transform rural areas economically and culturally, positioning nature as a “domain to be civilised.” Yet the problem lay in reducing nature to mere instrumentality, thereby overshadowing students’ sensory, ethical, and cultural development (Illich, 1971; Yıldız & Akandere, 2017). In the case of Hasanoğlan, “significant changes in the curriculum were made after 1946, and its character as a work school began to be diluted”; the process gradually led to closure, with “the Higher Village Institute being shut down in 1947, and by 1954 the institutes were merged with Teacher Training Schools” (Gökdemir, 2019). Contemporary literature, however, stresses that environmental education cannot be confined solely to knowledge or technical dimensions; ethical and affective components must also be institutionally strengthened (Sterling, 2001; Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025).

In conclusion, the historical positioning of Hasanoğlan produced a discourse in which nature was not the subject of learning but largely its object, and a tool for development. This legacy offers a critical background that renders visible the historical roots of today’s technical–instrumental tendencies in environmental education.

Practical Agricultural Education and the Instrumentalisation of Nature. The clearest and most systematic manifestation of the relationship established with nature in the Village Institutes emerged through practical agricultural education. While this model allowed students direct contact with nature, such contact was predominantly defined through a production-oriented instrumentality. Agricultural activities aimed not so much

at enabling students to observe and understand nature, but rather at transforming it for productive use; hence, the meaning ascribed to nature was framed less by pedagogy and more by economic functions.

This orientation is explicit in both the legal and programmatic foundations. Law No. 3803 assigned village teachers the responsibility of establishing “model fields, vineyards, orchards, and workshops,” thereby institutionalising an education–nature relationship framed around production and efficiency (TBMM, 1940). Curriculum analyses further demonstrate that lesson hours were significantly weighted in favour of agricultural and technical activities (Baş & Ercan, 2023). As a result, spaces such as fields, gardens, and barns often ceased to function merely as learning environments, instead becoming production units; the student experience was interpreted in terms of performance, output, and planning (Yıldız & Akandere, 2017; Gökdemir, 2019).

Everyday practices rendered this framework visible. Agricultural courses (crop farming, horticulture, industrial plants, zootechnics, poultry, apiculture–sericulture, fishing, etc.) were scheduled for eleven hours per week in each grade (Toprak, 2008). Technical courses also received eleven hours per week; male students were trained in fields such as blacksmithing, carpentry, masonry, and joinery, while female students were instructed in tailoring, sewing, weaving, and agricultural crafts (Burgaç, 2009; Makal, 2009). Although this division reflected the gender perceptions of the time, the common ground lay in the transformation of nature and the acquisition of skills that would contribute functionally to village life. The products generated directly supported institute life: students themselves provided desks, benches, clothes, and agricultural produce. In some institutes, thousands of acres of farmland and vegetable gardens were cultivated through collective student labour, and technical knowledge and production support were extended to surrounding villages (Yılmaz, 2009; Serter, 2007).

This production-centred framework overshadowed the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of students’ relationship with nature. While they were directed to think in categories of productivity and functionality through soil, produce, and labour, the scope for intuition, empathy, and affective awareness was limited. Thus, nature was represented not as a pedagogical subject but as an object serving development.

From a comparative perspective, international literature highlights a different orientation. The place-based learning approach (Sobel, 2004) conceives nature not merely as a resource for production but as a domain of observation, intuition, and experience. The Tbilisi Declaration lists the ability to establish empathetic and ethical relations among the fundamental aims of environmental education (UNESCO, 1978). Similarly, works such as Sterling (2001) and Mutlu & Yaşar (2025) underline that environmental education cannot be confined to the transmission of technical knowledge; its value- and sensitivity-based dimensions must also be institutionally reinforced.

In conclusion, while practical agricultural education in the Village Institutes carried the potential for contact with nature, this potential was restricted by its subordination to the ideal of the productive citizen. The student–nature relationship was primarily structured through technical skills, with opportunities to develop emotional and ethical bonds systematically curtailed. This condition exposes the instrumentalisation of nature as an ideological choice, offering a critical historical background for contemporary environmental education.

Conceptual Analysis through Hasanoğlu. From 1941 onwards, the Hasanoğlu Village Institute was constructed not only as a centre of spatial capacity and administrative organisation but also as the pedagogical and ideological core of the system, through its practice-oriented educational approach. For this reason, legal regulations concerning Hasanoğlu, academic analyses of curricula, and institutional histories are of primary value for conceptually examining the meanings attributed to nature at the time. These sources reveal that nature was most often positioned as the subject of production, the object of labour, and the field of citizenship education.

Production-Oriented Discourse and Concepts. Law No. 3803 on the Village Institutes assigned village teachers the responsibility of establishing “model fields, vineyards, orchards, and workshops,” thereby defining the link between education and nature within the axis of production and development (TBMM, 1940). Analyses of curricula reveal a significant weighting of lesson hours towards agricultural and technical activities; the pedagogical vocabulary became marked by concepts such as “production, efficiency, processing, and planning” (Baş & Ercan, 2023). This discourse constructed nature less as a field of “sensory/aesthetic engagement” than as a sphere of “performance and output.” At Hasanoğlu, students became active agents of transforming nature, not only through agricultural production but also by producing desks, uniforms, and even school buildings (Makal, 2009; Burgaç, 2009).

Passive Nature Discourse. In the institutional narrative, nature was largely depicted as an area to be “reclaimed, organised, and utilised,” producing a hierarchy of ruler–ruled in the human–nature relationship. Historical studies on Hasanoğlu’s central role in the system demonstrate that this instrumental outlook permeated organisational operations and daily practices (Altunya & Kınacı, 2018; Yıldız & Akandere, 2017). Students cultivated thousands of acres of farmland while also staging theatrical performances, thus bringing cultural and economic production together (Serter, 2007). Nonetheless, nature’s positioning was most often reduced to that of a passive object within the context of production and development.

The Higher Village Institute and Conceptual Depth. The Higher Village Institute, opened at Hasanoğlu in 1942, selected graduates of other institutes for a three-year, free, residential programme; its aim was not only to train teachers but also educational planners, researchers, and cultural leaders (Yalçın, 2009, 2012). Students were required to play at least one musical instrument, participate in artistic activities in Ankara, and prepare an academic study. As Tonguç remarked, Hasanoğlu was envisaged as “the nucleus of a dynamic university that would examine the country’s problems through a scientific approach.” In this sense, Hasanoğlu carried the practices of instrumentalising nature into a university-level conceptual framework.

Comparative Perspective. Contemporary environmental education highlights a holistic design of learning that includes ethical, affective, and intuitive dimensions, rather than being confined to technical knowledge and resource management. Sterling (2001) emphasises the transformative nature of learning; Sobel (2004) stresses place-based experience and observation; UNESCO’s Belgrade (1975) and Tbilisi (1978) declarations emphasise empathy, responsibility, and value-based goals. The Ontario Ministry of Education highlights concepts such as interdependence, biodiversity, stewardship, and resilience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Compared with these conceptual

clusters, Hasanoğlu's institutional vocabulary is seen to have concentrated heavily on production–efficiency–planning.

Pedagogical Consequence. Since this production-oriented structure defined the student's relationship with nature in terms of technical skills and outputs, ethical sensitivity, aesthetic awareness, and affective connection remained weak at an institutional level. In contrast, contemporary environmental education literature stresses the need for education to be transformative and holistic (Sterling, 2001; Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025). The Hasanoğlu example thus provides a conceptual legacy that makes visible the historical roots of the technical–instrumental orientation still observed in today's curricula.

Table 1. Conceptual Comparison between the Hasanoğlu Discourse and Contemporary Environmental Education Frameworks

Concept	In the Hasanoğlu discourse	In contemporary environmental education frameworks
Efficiency	Strongly emphasised	Moderate, balanced with values/ethics
Processing/Transformation	High, technical in content	Moderate, balanced with ecological limits
Planning	High, linked to production performance	High, but system- and community-oriented
Observation	Limited sensory, mostly technical	Both sensory and analytical
Intuition	Low, exceptional	High, integral to learning
Ethical Sensitivity	Weak/implicit	Strong, a fundamental principle
Biodiversity	Limited visibility	A core ecological value
Interdependence	Weak	Foundational concept
Stewardship	Weak	A value-based goal
Resilience	Absent/implicit	Strong at both ecosystem and individual levels

Note: The Hasanoğlu column reflects conceptual emphases evident in law and curriculum analyses, while the contemporary column is based on the principles of UNESCO and Ontario frameworks.

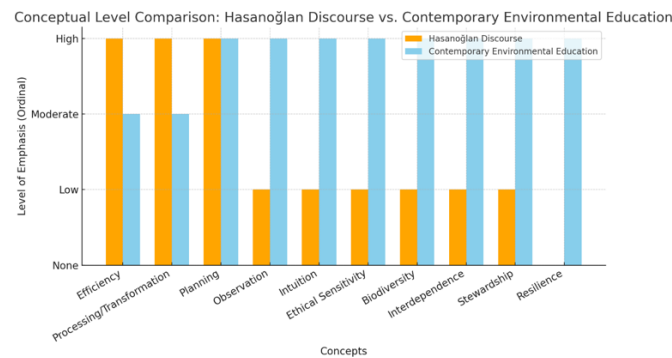


Figure 1. Educational Emphasis of Concepts: Hasanoglan vs. Contemporary Approaches

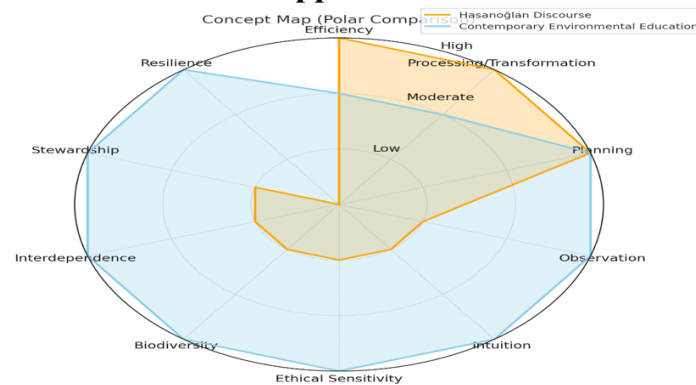


Figure 2. Concept Map (Polar Comparison) of Hasanoğlu Discourse and Contemporary Environmental Education

The radar chart illustrates the emphasis levels across key conceptual categories. While Hasanoğlu discourse foregrounds efficiency, processing/transformation, and planning, it remains limited in observation, intuition, and ethical sensitivity. By contrast, contemporary frameworks emphasise biodiversity, interdependence, stewardship, resilience, and ethical engagement, highlighting a broader and value-oriented approach to environmental education.

Legacy for Contemporary Education and Critical Evaluation. The conceptualisation of nature shaped within the Village Institutes was not merely a historical pedagogical preference but a legacy that continues to influence the conceptual background of contemporary environmental education practices. The production-oriented approach, exemplified in Hasanoğlu, has paved the way for environmental content in many current curricula to be framed within a technical and instrumental perspective. This historical continuity can still be traced in today's education policies, where nature is predominantly defined as a "unit of production" or a "resource."

At the curriculum level, the Ministry of National Education's 2018 Science Curriculum makes environmental issues visible; however, a significant portion of the objectives is structured around behavioural/technical goals such as recycling, energy efficiency, and resource conservation (MEB, 2018). This framework tends to represent nature as a resource to be managed or conserved. By contrast, UNESCO's Belgrade (1975) and Tbilisi (1978) declarations, as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education's environmental literacy framework, emphasise the incorporation of empathy, value-based responsibility, interdependence, and biodiversity into the curriculum (UNESCO, 1975; UNESCO, 1978; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). A comparative reading indicates that Turkish content still largely operates within a resource management paradigm.

Similar tendencies are also observed in teacher education. In most programmes, environmental education is confined to the science domain and addressed within limited time slots, while the necessity of strengthening affective/ethical and interdisciplinary components is repeatedly emphasised (Gülersoy et al., 2020; Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025). Recent empirical findings reveal that, despite high levels of environmental concern and positive attitudes among students, knowledge and awareness often remain at a moderate level—corroborating the contemporary echoes of historical instrumentalism (Dalkılıç, Erbaşı & Erbaşı, 2024).

School spaces and pedagogical approaches also reflect this continuity. Experiential contact with nature is often limited, while place-based and outdoor-oriented models call for a transformation that prioritises observation, intuition, and ethical engagement with the environment (Sobel, 2004; Sterling, 2001). Such transformation can only be achieved not merely through diverse activities but by adopting a "whole school approach" that integrates curriculum, space, and community (Sterling, 2001; UNESCO, 1978).

The conception of nature inherited from the Village Institutes has produced a technical/instrumental continuity within the education system. A critical re-reading of this legacy is necessary to enrich curricula with ethical, aesthetic, and affective dimensions and to strengthen teacher education through place-based and value-oriented approaches. Such a reconfiguration would pave the way for a holistic environmental education that positions nature not merely as an object of knowledge but as a subject and partner in learning (UNESCO, 1978; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; Sterling, 2001; Sobel, 2004).

The analysis demonstrates that the Village Institutes—particularly Hasanoğlu—constructed a pedagogical relationship with nature primarily through the lenses of productivity, efficiency, and national development. While this approach was historically understandable within the context of early Republican modernisation, it systematically limited aesthetic, ethical, and affective dimensions of learning. The enduring influence of this instrumental legacy can still be observed in today’s curricula, teacher education programmes, and school ecologies, where environmental content remains heavily framed by technical and resource-management discourses. By contrast, contemporary international frameworks emphasise empathy, interdependence, biodiversity, and stewardship as indispensable pillars of environmental literacy. Re-examining the Village Institutes’ heritage through this lens highlights both the constraints and contributions of their pedagogical model, underscoring the need for a transformative educational vision in which nature is engaged not merely as an object of production but as a partner in knowledge, ethics, and community.

Discussion. The findings of this study indicate that in the Village Institutes—particularly in the case of Hasanoğlu—the relationship with nature was largely shaped around axes of production and technical performance; nature was positioned not as a pedagogical subject but predominantly as a resource to be transformed (TBMM, 1940; Baş & Ercan, 2023; Yıldız & Akandere, 2017; Altunya & Kınacı, 2018). This historical framework does not represent a preference confined to the past; it continues today through the language of curricula, assessment practices, and the organisation of school environments, thereby producing a technical–instrumental continuity.

Firstly, continuity is striking in terms of programme language and objectives. Although the Ministry of National Education’s 2018 Science Curriculum has made environmental themes more visible within the curriculum, a substantial proportion of the learning outcomes are structured around behavioural/technical targets such as recycling, energy efficiency, and resource conservation (MEB, 2018). This orientation tends to represent nature as a resource to be managed or conserved, relegating opportunities for students to establish meaningful, aesthetic, and ethical bonds with the natural world.

Secondly, trends in teacher education are consistent with this historical legacy. Environmental education in most programmes remains confined to the science domain, addressed within limited time frames, and predominantly treated as knowledge–skill transmission. The literature repeatedly underlines the need to strengthen affective/ethical and interdisciplinary components (Gülersoy et al., 2020; Mutlu & Yaşar, 2025). Recent empirical findings further reveal that although students exhibit high levels of environmental concern and positive attitudes, their levels of knowledge and awareness often remain moderate—signalling the contemporary projection of instrumentalism (Dalkılıç, Erbaşı & Erbaşı, 2024).

Thirdly, school ecology and spatial organisation limit students’ experiential contact with nature. Due to urbanisation and security concerns, the usability of schoolyards for observation, experimentation, and creative expression is restricted; in many schools, nature is reduced to a visual backdrop. While this may differ from the “production area” logic of the Village Institutes, it nonetheless produces a learning order in which nature is externalised rather than engaged as a partner in learning.

Comparative frameworks point to an alternative trajectory. UNESCO’s Belgrade (1975) and Tbilisi (1978) declarations and Ontario’s policy framework emphasise that

environmental education must guarantee not only knowledge and skills but also empathy, value-based responsibility, biodiversity, interdependence, and resilience (UNESCO, 1975; UNESCO, 1978; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Place-based and transformative learning approaches highlight that students' relationships with nature should be grounded in observation, intuition, and meaning; and that learning should be organised in conjunction with local ecosystems, seasonality, and community (Sobel, 2004; Sterling, 2001). This perspective makes visible the technical–instrumental continuity of the historical legacy while simultaneously underlining the need for a holistic reconstruction.

Such reconstruction may be addressed on three levels:

1. *Conceptual level*: Technical categories such as “resource efficiency” should be balanced with notions of ethical sensitivity, aesthetic awareness, and ecological interdependence (UNESCO, 1978; Sterling, 2001).

2. *Pedagogical level*: Affective and value dimensions should be systematically integrated through place-based design, outdoor activities, nature journals, and creative expression practices (Sobel, 2004).

3. *Institutional/ecosystem level*: A whole-school approach should strengthen school–family–community relations; school spaces should be arranged for observation and experience; and assessment should include indicators of meaning-making and ethical reflection alongside behavioural outcomes (UNESCO, 1978; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Finally, the legacy under discussion is not one-dimensional. The Village Institutes' emphasis on labour-based learning foregrounded values such as responsibility, communal production, and collaboration. These dimensions could contribute positively to contemporary environmental education's “learning by doing” paradigm. The problem lies in the fact that such contributions were not balanced with ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The issue, therefore, is not to “reject the past,” but to critically and selectively reinterpret the historical legacy in order to construct a pedagogical language that positions nature as both the subject and partner of learning (UNESCO, 1978; Sterling, 2001; Sobel, 2004).

This expanded discussion contextualises the study's findings across programme language, teacher education, school ecology, and comparative standards, substantiating the need for a value- and sensitivity-oriented framework that transcends technical–instrumental continuity.

Conclusion. This study has demonstrated that the meaning attributed to nature within the Village Institutes—particularly in the case of Hasanoglan—was largely shaped around the concepts of production, efficiency, and planning, and that this discourse generated a technical–instrumental continuity in contemporary education. Such an orientation positioned nature not as a subject of learning but as an object, thereby marginalising dimensions such as observation, intuition, empathy, and aesthetic sensitivity. The findings further reveal that in today's curricula and practices, environmental content is likewise often limited to resource management and behavioural outcomes.

The research makes contributions at two levels. Firstly, by re-reading the Village Institute pedagogy's conception of nature within a conceptual framework, it systematically highlights the foundational weight of the production–efficiency–planning axis. Secondly, by discussing the reflection of this historical legacy in current environmental education practices, it reveals the imbalance between technical–cognitive

emphases and affective–ethical components, clarifying the pathways of transition between historical continuity and contemporary transformation.

The results indicate that environmental education should not be confined to knowledge transmission and behavioural change objectives. When the role of nature in the learning process is redefined from a “resource to be managed/conserved” to a “partner in learning,” students’ meaning-making, value orientation, and ethical sensitivity will be strengthened. This redefinition requires the following transformations:

- *Curriculum*: Expanding place-based experiences; systematising activities of observation, description, creative expression, and seasonal monitoring.
- *Learning environment*: Designing school spaces to facilitate continuous engagement with nature; integrating outdoor learning into routine practice.
- *Assessment*: Considering not only technical/behavioural outcomes but also indicators of meaning-making and ethical reflection.

The findings also underscore the decisive role of teacher education. Incorporating fields such as environmental aesthetics, ecopedagogy, and environmental ethics alongside environmental knowledge would reposition the teacher from being a mere manager of technical practices to a guide who facilitates students’ multidimensional relationships with nature. When supported through a whole-school approach and strengthened school–family–community cooperation, such a transformation has the potential to create lasting impact.

Limitations and future research. This study is limited in that its historical material is based primarily on institutional discourse and programme analyses, and affective/aesthetic experiences are largely discussed through indirect indicators. Future studies should include comparative analyses of different institute examples, qualitative datasets enriched with student/alumni narratives, and longitudinal designs that track the impact of place-based experiences in contemporary school practices.

In conclusion, the conception of nature extending from the Village Institutes to the present has durably shaped the language and priorities of environmental education. Critically re-reading this legacy and transforming a knowledge–skill-oriented framework into a holistic learning design balanced by ethical, aesthetic, and affective dimensions carries the potential for a qualitative leap not only in environmental issues but across all dimensions of learning. A pedagogical orientation that positions nature not merely as a resource to be conserved/managed but as a subject and partner in learning will strengthen both individual worlds of meaning and collective sustainability.

The findings of this study highlight the need to reconsider the historical legacy of the Village Institutes not as a static heritage but as a critical lens for rethinking contemporary educational practice. By exposing the instrumental foundations of past pedagogical models, the study invites policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators to balance technical and cognitive priorities with ethical, aesthetic, and affective dimensions. In doing so, environmental education can move beyond resource management paradigms and contribute to cultivating citizens who approach nature with empathy, responsibility, and creativity. More broadly, integrating such holistic perspectives into education has the potential to enrich learning across disciplines and to foster a sustainable and socially engaged educational culture.

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