



Sustainable Curriculum: Educating for the Future

Education is an essential tool for sustainable development, promoting the development of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in people to care for their environment (Nasibulina, 2015; UNESCO, 2021). Globally, governments are attempting to address sustainable development and the climate emergency (Aikens & McKenzie, 2021). Often, education is turned to, as a tool in combating this pressing issue. There is great diversity globally, in the stage at which nations are imbedding sustainability in their curriculums. For example, Australia is ensuring that all new teachers are ready and able to teach for sustainability in schools, in China the government is encouraging primary and secondary students to learn about ways to reduce their own carbon footprint and in Italy teachers are now required to include 33 hours of teaching per year on sustainable development and climate change (Climate Scoreboard, 2020; International Bureau of Education, 2020; Ferreira et al. 2007)

Finland's Success in Education for Sustainable Development

Finland is perhaps leading the field in this respect. In Finland, the goals of Education for Sustainable Development have been included in the Finnish National Core Curriculum, which include enhancing student's abilities and motivation to act on behalf of the environment, to become committed to a sustainable way of living and to raise environmentally conscious citizens (Uitto et al. 2011). Finland also encourages outdoor learning. Finnish Nature Schools help to promote the concept of sustainability, learning about the local environment and environmental sensitivity (Sjöblom & Svens, 2019). Finland is also known for its high quality teacher education programmes which are said to be another factor related to Finland's success in educating its students on sustainability (Ustan & Eryilmaz, 2018).



Northern Ireland's Target

Northern Ireland is currently working towards a net-zero carbon policy along with the UK by 2050 (Department of the Economy). It is essential that the young people in Northern Ireland, who are growing up in this time of climate change crisis, are well educated in the causes of climate change and how they can mitigate the effects of climate change. As we transition into a world of advanced technologies and renewable energy it is important for the students of Northern Ireland to develop the knowledge and skills required to enable a transition to a low carbon economy. Looking at the Northern Ireland curriculum, is education for sustainable development catered for? What more needs to be done to enhance our students learning, behaviour towards and enthusiasm for tackling climate change here in Northern Ireland?

Our Contribution

This current project aims to distinguish if there is a link between countries that have progressed in the area of combating climate change and their educational curriculum. The three main areas of research are:

- Does Northern Ireland's education on climate change need improvements?
- What are students and teachers' attitude towards climate change in Finland and Northern Ireland?
- What skills and capabilities are incorporated into each curriculum and how can these be used in addressing climate change?

Empirical data collection into sustainable educational approaches is a relatively under researched area of educational provision. Through a case study approach eight schools in both Northern Ireland and Finland will be examined for their attitudes, values and practical application of sustainable education. Data will be collected by a number of different methods including an online survey which will be sent to students in various year groups and teachers across all subjects. It is the researchers hope to also visit some of the schools in Finland and Northern Ireland to participate in focus groups with a number of students and interviews with subject teachers and head teachers. The researcher also hopes to have the opportunity to interview the Educational Minister of both Northern Ireland and Finland.

Through dissemination it is hoped that a comparative case study, between the educational models used and the curriculum delivered in Northern Ireland and Finland, will allow educational curriculum developers to become aware of the growing need to incorporate more education on sustainable development and climate change education into every aspect of the school curriculum.