

Volume 8, Issue 1, April 2026 p. 184-201

Istanbul / Türkiye

Article Information

Article Type: Research Article

This article has been checked for similarity.

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Article History:

Received

28/09/2025

Received in

revised form

05/03/2026

Accepted

30/04/2026



ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL TURKISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract

This study examined at which grade levels, within which conceptual frameworks, and with what frequency environmental and climate change issues were included in middle school Turkish language textbooks published in 2024. The study was conducted using document analysis, one of the qualitative research designs. Within the scope of the review, six Turkish language textbooks for the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade levels were evaluated. Content analysis was used to analyze the data, based on the codes of climate change, global warming, environmental awareness, disruption of natural balance, protection of natural balance, environmental threats, unplanned settlement, and environmental pollution. The findings showed that environmental and climate change content was included in the textbooks to a limited extent and did not display a balanced distribution across grade levels. The content was found to be concentrated particularly at the 5th and 6th grade levels, to decrease at the 7th grade level, and to be absent at the 8th grade level. In addition, environment-related content was mostly addressed at the level of general value transmission, while current environmental problems such as climate change and global warming were covered in a limited number of texts and activities. As a result, it was concluded that environmental and climate change issues in middle school Turkish language textbooks should be addressed through a more holistic and continuous approach that is also sustained at upper grade levels.

Keywords: Middle school Turkish language textbooks, Environmental education, Climate change, Document analysis, Content analysis

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Introduction

Environmental problems and climate change have moved beyond being issues limited to science or environmental policy; they have become multidimensional matters that directly concern education, culture, value transmission, and social responsibility. The sustainable continuity of the relationship between humans and nature is closely associated with individuals' development of environmental knowledge, sensitivity, and responsibility. For this reason, environmental education is regarded as a fundamental field of education that aims to help students learn environmental concepts and develop responsible behaviors toward environmental problems (Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Zelezny, 1999). The main purpose of environmental education is to develop positive attitudes and behaviors toward the environment. Attitude consists of an individual's emotions, thoughts, knowledge, and values, and is shaped by personal differences (Sakalli, 2001). In this respect, environmental education is a holistic process that includes affective and behavioral dimensions as well as cognitive learning.

In recent years, climate change education has increasingly come to the fore as an important component of environmental education. Since climate change is a complex issue in terms of its causes, consequences, and solutions, it is not considered sufficient for students merely to acquire knowledge about the subject; they are also expected to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, responsibility-taking, and action-oriented skills. According to Monroe, Plate, Oxarart, Bowers, and Chaves (2019), effective climate change education should provide personally meaningful content for students, include active learning processes, and enable students to connect scientific knowledge with daily life. UNESCO (2024a) also emphasizes that climate change education should not be reduced to the transmission of knowledge alone, and that it should be supported by social-emotional learning, behavior development, and action-oriented learning processes. This approach requires environmental and climate change issues to be addressed in school curricula through continuous, interdisciplinary, and value-based content.

Textbooks, as well as curricula, have a decisive function in developing environmental consciousness and climate awareness in educational settings. Textbooks are among the primary tools through which the aims,

learning outcomes, and values included in curricula are conveyed to students. Curricula, which shape society's future vision and sociological profile, reflect this vision and these goals in textbooks as an important educational material (Değirmenci, Kuzey, & Yetişensoy, 2019; Demirel, 2007). Textbooks provide a systematic structure for the teaching-learning process and make students' development more planned and measurable (Sever, 2010). In this respect, textbooks serve as basic resources for both teachers and students. Prepared in accordance with the aims and learning outcomes of the curriculum, these materials enable knowledge to be learned in an organized way and stand out as indispensable tools that accompany the learning process both inside and outside school (Ünveren Kapanadze, 2018).

Textbooks are not merely materials that transmit information; they are also cultural tools that shape students' value systems, social sensitivities, and perspectives on life. The texts, visuals, activities, and guiding questions included in textbooks can help students acquire various values either explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, how issues such as the environment, nature, sustainability, and climate change are represented in textbooks is important. The texts and visuals in textbooks support the topics covered while also carrying implicit messages intended to be conveyed to individuals and society (Önal, Kaya, & Çalışkan, 2019). From this perspective, the presence of environmental and climate change content in textbooks, as well as the grade levels, frequency, and contexts in which this content is presented, should be examined.

The Turkish language course is not only a subject aimed at developing language skills; it also contributes to students' acquisition of values, culture, sensitivity, and social responsibility through the texts they read. The texts included in Turkish language textbooks can improve students' reading, comprehension, interpretation, critical thinking, and expression skills while also helping them develop awareness of the environment, nature, and social problems. For this reason, examining how a current and global theme such as the environment and climate change is addressed in Turkish language textbooks is important. The middle school period, in particular, is a critical educational stage in which environmental sensitivity can be supported in terms of students' cognitive and affective development. Environmental content included in textbooks during this period can contribute to students'

recognition of environmental problems, understanding of the relationship between nature and humans, and development of a sustainable way of life.

The increasing visibility of environmental and climate change issues in educational programs in Türkiye makes it necessary to examine textbooks in terms of these themes. The inclusion of the “Nature and Universe” theme in the Turkish Language Curriculum implemented by the Ministry of National Education enables issues such as the environment, nature, the universe, natural balance, and environmental responsibility to be addressed in Turkish language courses (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018). However the inclusion of a theme in the curriculum does not necessarily mean that the theme is addressed in textbooks in a balanced and sufficient way. For textbooks to function effectively in terms of environmental education, environmental and climate change content is expected to be addressed through a holistic and continuous approach rather than being limited to certain grade levels or a small number of activities. UNESCO’s current approach to greening curricula for climate action also states that climate change and sustainability issues should be addressed at different age levels in accordance with the principles of scientific accuracy, action orientation, and connection with real life (UNESCO, 2024b).

This study examines the extent to which the theme of environment and climate change is included in middle school Turkish language textbooks published by different publishing houses in 2024. The main purpose of the study is to determine at which grade levels, within which concepts, and with what frequency environmental and climate change issues are included in middle school Turkish language textbooks. For this purpose, the study aims to reveal the current state of Turkish language textbooks in terms of environmental education and climate change awareness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, to determine the extent to which environmental and climate change issues are included in middle school Turkish language textbooks and the contexts in which they are presented. Document analysis is a qualitative research method based on the systematic examination of written, visual, or printed materials related to the research topic (Bowen, 2009). This method allows researchers to generate data from existing

documents, identify patterns of meaning within documents, and interpret them in line with the research questions (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003).

Document analysis is considered an appropriate method especially for examining educational written materials such as textbooks, curricula, guidelines, reports, and institutional documents (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Document analysis was preferred in this study because the main data source consisted of middle school Turkish language textbooks. Since textbooks are among the main materials used to convey the themes, learning outcomes, and values included in curricula to students, examining how environmental and climate change themes are represented in these books directly corresponds to the purpose of the study.

Materials Examined

The materials examined in the study consisted of Turkish language textbooks published in 2024 and used at the middle school level. A total of six Turkish language textbooks for the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade levels were examined (MoNE, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Yıldırım Yayınları, 2024; Özgün Yayınları, 2024; Hecce Yayıncılık, 2024).

Table 1. Information on the books examined

Grade Level	Year	Publisher	Number of Pages
5th grade	2024	MoNE	192
6th grade	2024	MoNE	265
6th grade	2024	Yıldırım Yayınları	288
7th grade	2024	MoNE	262
7th grade	2024	Özgün Yayıncılık	256
8th grade	2024	Hecce Yayıncılık	302

The scope of the study included the main reading texts in the textbooks, as well as preparatory activities, exercises, visuals, instructions, comprehension questions, and free reading texts. This choice was made to determine how environmental and climate change issues were represented within the holistic structure of the textbook, rather than only through explicit texts. In qualitative research, documents should be evaluated not only in terms of their content but also in terms of their purpose of use and context (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection Process

The data of the study were obtained through the systematic examination of the selected textbooks. During the data collection process, the books were first classified according to grade level and publisher. Each book was then examined from beginning to end, and sections related to concepts such as environment, nature, climate change, global warming, environmental awareness, natural balance, environmental pollution, environmental threats, and similar concepts were identified.

During the review, the grade level, publisher, page number, content type, and related code for each finding were recorded. Content types were classified as reading text, preparatory activity, exercise, visual, instruction, and question. This process created an organized data recording procedure so that the data could later be analyzed comparatively. In qualitative research, conducting the data collection process systematically is one of the main elements that increase the traceability and credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is an analysis technique that enables the systematic examination of specific concepts, themes, and patterns of meaning in written or visual materials (Krippendorff, 2018). In this study, expressions, activities, and visuals related to the environment and climate change in the textbooks were identified; these contents were then coded and evaluated within a thematic structure.

During the coding process, both the concepts predetermined in line with the purpose of the study and the contents that emerged during the

examination of the textbooks were used. Accordingly, the codes “climate change,” “global warming,” “environmental awareness,” “disruption of natural balance,” “protection of natural balance,” “environmental threats,” “unplanned settlement,” and “environmental pollution” were created. The frequency with which each code appeared at each grade level and in each textbook was shown through frequency values. Thus, the distribution of environmental and climate change issues according to grade level and publisher was presented.

During the analysis process, contents related to the environment and climate change were first identified in the textbooks and then classified under appropriate codes. The frequencies of the codes were then calculated, and the findings were presented through tables. In the final stage, the findings were interpreted by supporting them with examples from the relevant textbook sections. In qualitative research, supporting data with direct quotations, cases, or document excerpts increases the clarity and credibility of the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are more commonly used instead of validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the textbooks examined were clearly introduced, and the data collection and analysis processes were explained in detail to ensure credibility. To support transferability, the grade level, publisher, publication year, and number of pages of the materials examined in the study were presented in a table.

To ensure the consistency of the coding process, the environmental and climate change content identified in the textbooks was systematically coded by the researcher. During coding, the same content was reviewed more than once, and attention was paid to grouping similar content under the same code. In addition, whether the codes were consistent with the purpose of the study was checked. In qualitative research, clearly defining the coding process and reviewing the data again are among the important practices that increase the consistency of the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

No data were collected from human participants in this study; only published textbooks were examined as documents. Therefore, the study did not involve a data collection process requiring participant consent.

Findings

This section presents the findings regarding the inclusion of environmental and climate change issues in middle school Turkish language textbooks published in 2024. As a result of the review, the codes “climate change,” “global warming,” “environmental awareness,” “disruption of natural balance,” “protection of natural balance,” “environmental threats,” “unplanned settlement,” and “environmental pollution” were identified in the textbooks. The findings are presented according to grade level and publisher in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion of environmental and climate change issues in Turkish language textbooks

Code	f	5th Grade MoNE	6th Grade MoNE	6th Grade Yıldırım	7th Grade Özgün	7th Grade MoNE	8th Grade Hecce
Climate change	2	1	1	–	–	–	–
Global warming	3	–	3	–	–	–	–
Environmental awareness	3	2	–	–	1	–	–
Disruption of natural balance	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
Protection of natural balance	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
Environmental threats	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
Unplanned settlement	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
Environmental pollution	1	–	–	–	–	1	–

Recent research distinguishes ‘pedagogical’ translinguaging from When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that environmental and climate change issues are included in a limited number of contents in middle school Turkish language textbooks. The code of climate change was found once in the 5th

Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook and once in the 6th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook. The code of global warming was identified only in the 6th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook, with three occurrences. The code of environmental awareness appeared twice in the 5th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook and once in the 7th Grade Özgün Publishing Turkish language textbook. The codes of disruption of natural balance, protection of natural balance, environmental threats, and unplanned settlement were identified only in the 6th Grade Yıldırım Publishing Turkish language textbook. The code of environmental pollution was found only in the 7th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook. No finding related to environmental and climate change issues was identified in the 8th Grade Hecce Publishing Turkish language textbook examined in the study.

When the general distribution is examined, it is seen that environmental and climate change issues are mostly included at the 5th and 6th grade levels, while these issues are addressed in a limited way at the 7th grade level, and no related content is found at the 8th grade level. This shows that environmental and climate change issues in middle school Turkish language textbooks do not have a balanced and continuous distribution across grade levels.

To clarify how the identified codes appeared in the textbooks, representative examples from the examined materials are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sample evidence from the textbooks

Grade Level	Publisher	Page	Content Type	Original Expression / Content	English Translation	Code
5th grade	MoNE	125	Activity	Çevre koruma bilincine yönelik boşluk doldurma etkinliği	Fill-in-the-blank activity on environmental protection awareness	Environmental awareness
5th grade	MoNE	152	Reading text	“Temizliği sevmek ve temiz olmak, çevrenin güzelliğini korumak duygusu da	“Loving cleanliness and being clean, as well as preserving the beauty of the environment,	Environmental awareness

Environmental and Climate Change Issues in Middle School Turkish Language Textbooks

Grade Level	Publisher	Page	Content Type	Original Expression / Content	English Translation	Code
6th grade	MoNE	70	Preparati on activity	bunlar arasındadır.” İklim değışikliđi ve küresel ısınmanın etkileri hakkında araştırma	are among these.” Research on the effects of climate change and global warming	Climate change / Global warming
6th grade	MoNE	76	Reading text / visual activity	İklim değışikliđi ve küresel ısınmaya ilişkin içerik	Content related to climate change and global warming	Climate change / Global warming
6th grade	Yıldırım	12	Reading text	Düzensiz yerleşimle ilişkili içerik	Content related to unplanned settlement	Unplanned settlement
6th grade	Yıldırım	197	Informati ve text	Arıların yaşam alanlarının korunmasına ilişkin metin	Text on protecting the habitats of bees	Protection of natural balance
6th grade	Yıldırım	204	Reading text	Küresel ısınma ve iklim değışikliđinin etkileriyle ortaya çıkan doğa olayları	Natural events caused by the effects of global warming and climate change	Environmental threats
7th grade	Özgün	240	Activity	Yaşanabilir çevreyle ilgili etkinlik	Activity related to a livable environment	Environmental awareness
7th grade	MoNE	186	Activity	“Çevre kirliliđi, günümüzün en büyük sorunlarından biridir.”	“Environmental pollution is one of today’s major problems.”	Environmental pollution

As shown in Table 3, environmental and climate change content appeared in different content types, including reading texts, preparatory activities, exercises, visuals, and informative texts. However, these examples also show that the content was mostly presented through short activities or limited textual references. Climate change and global warming were more visible in the 6th Grade MoNE textbook, while environmental awareness and natural balance were addressed through broader value-oriented content in different textbooks.

Environment and Climate Change in the 5th Grade MoNE Turkish Language Textbook

It was determined that environmental and climate change issues were included in a limited way in the 5th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook. The code of climate change appeared once, while the code of environmental awareness appeared twice in the book. Within the scope of the environmental awareness code, students were guided toward protecting nature, paying attention to environmental cleanliness, and developing responsibility toward the environment in which they live.

Environment and Climate Change in the 6th Grade MoNE Turkish Language Textbook

It was determined that environmental and climate change issues were addressed more directly in the 6th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook than in the 5th grade textbook. The code of climate change appeared once, while the code of global warming appeared three times in the book. This finding shows that environmental problems in the 6th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook are addressed mostly within the framework of global warming and climate change.



İklim değişikliği ve küresel ısınmanın etkileri hakkında bir araştırma yapınız.

Figure 1. Global warming and climate change, p. 70

Figure 1 presents a preparation activity in which students are asked to conduct research on the effects of climate change and global warming. This example shows that the 6th Grade MoNE textbook directly addresses current environmental problems through student research.

Environment and Climate Change in the 6th Grade Yıldırım Publishing Turkish Language Textbook

It was determined that environmental problems were addressed from different perspectives in the 6th Grade Yıldırım Publishing Turkish language textbook. The codes of disruption of natural balance, protection of natural balance, environmental threats, and unplanned settlement each appeared once in the book. This finding shows that the environment-related

content in the textbook was not limited to the concepts of climate change or global warming but was also addressed through natural balance, habitats, and environmental threats.



Figure 2. Environmental threats, p. 204

Figure 2 presents a reading text related to natural events associated with global warming and climate change. This example shows that environmental threats are addressed through the consequences of climate-related changes.

Environment and Climate Change in the 7th Grade MoNE Turkish Language Textbook

The code of environmental pollution appeared once in the 7th Grade MoNE Turkish language textbook. It is seen that this code was addressed at the activity level rather than through a direct environmental text. The related activity drew attention to environmental pollution as an important problem.

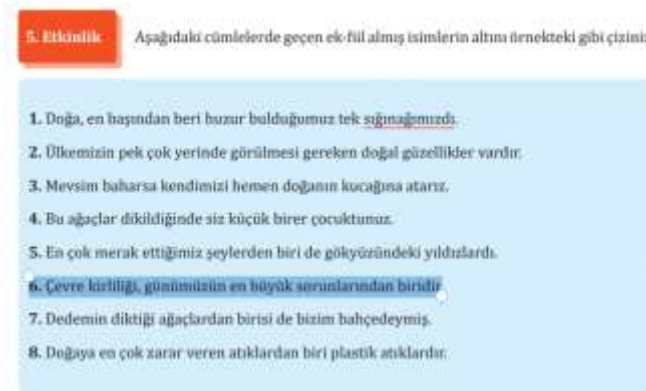


Figure 3. Environmental pollution, p. 186

Figure 3 presents an activity in which environmental pollution is described as one of today's major problems. This example shows that environmental

pollution is addressed at the activity level rather than through an extended reading text.

Environment and Climate Change in the 8th Grade Hecce Publishing Turkish Language Textbook

No finding related to environmental and climate change issues was identified in the 8th Grade Hecce Publishing Turkish language textbook examined in the study. No content that could be evaluated within the scope of climate change, global warming, environmental awareness, natural balance, environmental pollution, or environmental threats was found in the book.

Discussion

This study examined how and to what extent environmental and climate change issues were included in middle school Turkish language textbooks published in 2024. The results showed that content related to the environment and climate change was included in the textbooks to a limited extent. While issues such as climate change, global warming, environmental awareness, natural balance, and environmental threats were found particularly in the 5th and 6th grade textbooks, these contents decreased markedly at the 7th grade level, and no content related to the environment and climate change was identified at the 8th grade level. This finding shows that environmental and climate change issues are not distributed evenly across all grade levels in Turkish language textbooks and that a continuous environmental education approach has not been sufficiently established.

For environmental education to be effective, it is not sufficient to provide this education only at a certain grade level or through a limited number of activities. For environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to develop, environmental education should be presented in a continuous structure that is appropriate to students' age level and associated with different learning areas. According to Hungerford and Volk (1990), one of the main goals of environmental education is to help individuals become people who can take responsibility for environmental issues and develop behaviors aimed at solving environmental problems. Similarly, Zelezny (1999) states that environmental education practices can improve environmental behaviors, but this is possible through systematic and

effective educational processes. From this perspective, the weakening of environmental and climate change content especially at upper grade levels in the Turkish language textbooks examined in the study can be interpreted as an important deficiency in terms of the continuity of environmental education.

Another important finding of the study is that environment-related content is mostly addressed at the level of general value transmission, such as environmental awareness, cleanliness, love of nature, protection of natural balance, and environmental pollution. Such content is important for developing students' sensitivity toward the environment. However, the fact that current issues such as climate change, global warming, and environmental threats are addressed only through a limited number of texts or activities shows that the scientific, social, and global dimensions of the issue are not sufficiently visible. Climate change cannot be explained only through individual cleanliness habits or love of nature. This issue is related to multidimensional matters such as energy use, production-consumption relations, protection of natural resources, disaster risks, ecological balance, social responsibility, and global cooperation.

This finding becomes clearer when evaluated together with current approaches to climate change education. Monroe, Plate, Oxarart, Bowers, and Chaves (2019) state that effective climate change education should be structured in a way that is connected to students' daily lives, supports active learning, and guides students toward producing solutions. UNESCO (2024a) also emphasizes that climate change education should not be seen merely as a process of transmitting knowledge; rather, it should be structured to develop students' social-emotional awareness, critical thinking, and action-taking skills. From this perspective, limiting climate change in Turkish language textbooks to only a few preparatory activities or short texts may make it difficult for students to understand the issue in depth and relate it to different areas of life.

The role of Turkish language textbooks in environmental and climate change issues should not be limited to providing information. The Turkish language course is one of the core subjects that develops students' reading, comprehension, interpretation, discussion, and written and oral expression skills. Therefore, environmental and climate change themes can be considered in Turkish language courses not only as content but also as a

learning area that develops students' thinking and expression skills. Students' reading informative texts about environmental problems, discussing the consequences of climate change, writing opinion texts on sustainable living, or developing solution proposals for environmental problems can bring language skills and environmental awareness together within the same learning process.

The findings show that environmental and climate change issues are not distributed evenly across grade levels in the textbooks. While more content related to the environment and climate change was found at the 5th and 6th grade levels, these contents decreased at the 7th grade level, and no related finding was identified at the 8th grade level. This suggests that as students' grade level increases, their opportunities to address environmental and climate change issues in a more complex, critical, and solution-oriented way decrease. However, at upper grade levels, students' abilities to think abstractly, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and evaluate social problems from multiple perspectives develop. Therefore, limiting environmental and climate change content to lower grades can be considered a factor that restricts the environmental education potential of Turkish language textbooks.

The findings also show that environmental education is mostly included in Turkish language textbooks as an indirect form of value transmission. Content such as environmental cleanliness, protecting nature, respecting the habitats of living beings, and protecting natural balance can create basic environmental sensitivity among students. However, these contents should be supported by broader conceptual frameworks such as climate change, global warming, and sustainability. Otherwise, students may perceive environmental problems as limited mostly to individual behaviors. Contemporary environmental education, however, includes social, economic, and global responsibilities as well as individual responsibility. UNESCO's (2024b) approach to greening curricula for climate action also reveals that climate change and sustainability issues should be addressed in an interdisciplinary, action-oriented, and holistic manner.

Conclusion

This study examined the inclusion of environmental and climate change issues in middle school Turkish language textbooks published in 2024. The

findings showed that content related to the environment and climate change was included in the textbooks to a limited extent. In the books examined, the codes of climate change, global warming, environmental awareness, protection of natural balance, disruption of natural balance, environmental threats, unplanned settlement, and environmental pollution were identified. However, these codes were found not to display a balanced distribution according to grade levels and publishers.

The results showed that environmental and climate change issues were more visible especially in the 5th and 6th grade Turkish language textbooks, were addressed in a limited way at the 7th grade level, and were absent at the 8th grade level. This indicates that environmental and climate change issues are not addressed through a continuous approach in middle school Turkish language textbooks.

The study also found that environment-related content was mostly presented within the framework of general value transmission, such as environmental awareness, protecting nature, cleanliness, natural balance, and environmental pollution. By contrast, current and global issues such as climate change and global warming were included in a limited number of texts or activities. This result shows that although Turkish language textbooks have significant potential in terms of environmental education, this potential is used only to a limited extent in their current form.

As a result, it was determined that environmental and climate change issues are included in middle school Turkish language textbooks; however, this content is presented in a limited, irregular, and non-continuous structure across grade levels. Accordingly, it was concluded that Turkish language textbooks should be structured more functionally in terms of environmental education, climate change awareness, and the development of sustainable living consciousness.

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