



ECO- SCHOOLS

A STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF ECO-SCHOOLS THE NETHERLANDS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT - by Wanda Verstappen



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**THESIS: A STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF ECO-SCHOOLS THE
NETHERLANDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Background problem

Eco-Schools is an international quality mark for sustainable schools. The Eco-Schools quality mark was developed in 1994 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) as a result of the agreements of the United Nations (UN) conference 'Environment and Development'.

In 2003, the Eco-Schools programme was initiated in The Netherlands. SME Advies is responsible for the operations of the programme. Due to a slow take off, having 18 schools involved after 8 years, SME Advies choose, in October 2011, to reposition Eco-Schools (to fulfil the needs of the schools).

Even though there was substantial growth during the past two years and SME Advies/Eco-Schools The Netherlands carried out the above actions, it wants to know in what ways the Eco-Schools programme can be improved and grow further. Specifically, Eco-Schools had the following questions:

- How to support schools that joined Eco-Schools
- How to keep schools continuing with the Eco-Schools program after they have obtained the flag
- How to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools

Purpose

To gain insight into and assess the customer satisfaction of the Eco-Schools program in order to formulate recommendations for improvement.

Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework is customer satisfaction based, applying a combination of the Service Quality model (SERVQUAL model) proposed by Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml (1988) and the Customer Decision-Making model proposed by Dubrovski (2001). The SERVQUAL model measures the quality (satisfaction) of the service by measuring the expectations clients have of the service and the actual perception by clients of the service. The Customer Decision-Making model focuses on the different phases a customer goes through when making the decision to acquire a product or service.



Methodology

A survey was distributed and in-depth interviews were held among schools that are involved in the Eco-Schools programme.

Findings

Orientation phase

Most schools came in contact with Eco-Schools via the website/internet and educational platforms. In general the quality of the information services is good as the needs and actual performance are congruent. Respondents indicated that they attach greatest value to be answered well by telephone or mail.

Decision-making phase

Top 3 reasons to join Eco-Schools:

1. To embed sustainability in the structure and curriculum of the school
2. To increase the awareness of students of sustainability issues
3. The distinctive value

Top 3 possible considerations not to join Eco-Schools:

1. Costs
2. Amount of work
3. Other priorities

Active involvement phase

In general the quality of the products and tools is good. Social media was the only aspect where the needs and actual perceived performance were not in line with each other. The schools did rank this though as least important. The in-between certificates bronze and silver and the sustainability scan were ranked as most needed.

In general the quality of the guidance/support is good. The research showed however, that the needs and actual perceived performance of personal attention are not in line with each other. Respondents indicated that they were in need of personal attention the most.

Results regarding the seven-step plan showed that the sustainability scan (second step) was rated as the most easy step. The Eco-Code (the last step) was ranked as the most difficult.



Respondents indicated that they would like to exchange ideas either via a forum or a congress.

Continuation phase

Top 3 reasons to continue with Eco-Schools:

1. To embed sustainability in the structure and curriculum of the school
2. The distinctive value
3. To increase the awareness of students of sustainability issues

Top 2 possible considerations not to continue with Eco-Schools

1. Amount of work
2. Costs

Conclusion

In general the schools were satisfied with the quality of the Eco-Schools programme. The research showed that there is gap between the needs of schools and actual perceived performance regarding personal attention and social media. As respondents indicated that they are the most in need of the personal attention, this should be addressed.

Recommendations

- Include chat box on website
- Put forum on website
- Make use of Search Engine Optimization

Limitations and further research

The present research is limited to schools that have already taken the decision to join. For further research it would be of added value to include schools that decided not to join Eco-Schools or that started but did not continue.

Key words

Eco-Schools, SERVQUAL Model, Customer Decision-Making model



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

a	Alpha
FEE	Foundation for Environmental Education
FB	Facebook
e.g.	For example (<i>latin: exempli gratia</i>)
etc.	Etcetera
i.e.	For example (<i>latin: id est</i>)
n.d.	no date
Q	Question
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
UN	United Nations
UNESCO ASP	UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network



1. INTRODUCTION

Eco-Schools is an international quality mark for sustainable schools. The Eco-Schools quality mark was developed in 1994 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) as a result of the agreements of the United Nations (UN) conference 'Environment and Development'. A pilot was executed in Wales, Denmark and England, whereupon the concept was adopted in other countries of which The Netherlands is one. Worldwide 112.000 schools in 58 countries cooperate with Eco-Schools and of these 40,000 have obtained the quality mark. The quality mark is visualized as a green flag. With this quality mark schools can call themselves a sustainable school and in addition profile themselves as such (Eco-Schools 1, n.d.).

The Eco-Schools programme is a 'help'- programme with a bottom-up approach which guides schools to become sustainable. The aim of Eco-Schools is to make every school a sustainable school and to positively change behaviour of young people in schools and those connected to them regarding sustainability issues (Eco-Schools 1, n.d.).

The 'help'- programme contains of 1. An account manager who can help schools with the planning and motivational problems; providing assistance and organizing/giving two workshops, 2. Supporting materials; log-process guidance in seven steps and an environmental review, and 3. Supporting certificates (bronze and silver). The programme is organised along a number of themes: waste, communication, energy, building and environment, green, hygiene, mobility, security, nutrition, and water. Each school has to focus on three themes. In order to be certified for the quality mark schools have to pass through the seven step plan: 1. intention, 2. eco-team, 3. action, 4. monitoring and evaluation, 5. curriculum, 6. inform and involve, 7. eco-code (for more detail see Appendix I). It takes on average two years for a school to obtain the quality mark (Eco-Schools 2, n.d.).

In 2003, the Eco-Schools programme was initiated in The Netherlands. SME Advies is responsible for the operations of the programme. Due to a slow take off, having 18 schools involved after 8 years, SME Advies choose, in October 2011, to reposition Eco-Schools (to fulfil the needs of the schools). It was decided to:

1. Develop Eco-Schools into an independent label (without learning material). For teaching materials reference will be made to existing materials provided by other parties;
2. Offer the programme for free for the basis level of bronze and silver. All steps and methods can be found on the renewed website;



3. The costs for the quality mark (the green flag) are included in the audit of the school.

It seems that this new approach worked as, in May 2014, 86 schools are involved (for visualisation see Appendix). Points 2 and 3 however were withdrawn later on as it became clear that a lot of schools started to participate (without payment) but did not continue with the programme.

Previous actions that SME Advies did to improve the Eco-Schools programme were:

- Involve bigger 'parties', for instance primary, secondary and government councils;
- Look for another pay system -> subscriptions;
- Make a promo movie for Eco-Schools;
- Use social media;
- Look for sponsors (or for PR/Promo), like Stichting Nederland Schoon, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Energy Valley, Science Wageningen University;
- Call schools.

Even though there was substantial growth during the past two years and SME Advies/Eco-Schools The Netherlands carried out the above actions, it wants to know in what ways the Eco-Schools programme can be improved and grow further. Specifically, Eco-Schools had the following questions:

- How to support schools that joined Eco-Schools
- How to keep schools continuing with the Eco-Schools program after they have obtained the flag
- How to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools.

Hence, commissioned by SME Advies a customer satisfaction study was to be executed to find out the underlying reasons/motivations and ways to improve the Eco-Schools programme in the Netherlands. The research and advice report can be of interest to both SME Advies and FEE-Nederland, as well as for e.g. the centres for environmental education (EE).

The research is cross-organisational in character. The research topic 'Eco-Schools' and results are also relevant for other organizations than SME Advies both within the Netherlands and abroad. For this reason also an UNESCO School which is not taking part in the Eco-Schools programme was also interviewed; UNESCO is also a registered label.

The report has the following structure: Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework used which consists of the SERVQUAL Model and the Customer Decision-Making model and the proposed model for Eco-Schools. Chapter 3 contains of the problem definition which consists of the main research objective, main research questions, and sub-research questions. Chapter 4 explains the methodology which exists of sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, data processing. Chapter 5 presents



the results and the cross-organizational aspect highlighted. Chapter 6 provides the conclusions and recommendations. Chapter 7, the last chapter presents the advisory report.



2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SME Advies wishes to improve the Eco-Schools program in The Netherlands. The core is to enhance the quality of the programme, how to keep schools to continue with Eco-Schools (after they obtained the flag), and how to attract new schools.

Research into customer satisfaction with the Eco-Schools programme may give some explanation and eventually yield solutions to enhance the involvement of schools in the programme, as customer satisfaction normally results in clients or consumers acquiring the service, becoming actively involved in the service, and intentions to re-purchase the service (Kristensen, Martensen, & Gronholdt, 1999). For this reason the conceptual framework used for this research is customer satisfaction based, applying a combination of the Service Quality model (SERVQUAL model) proposed by Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml (1988) and the Customer Decision-Making model proposed by Dubrovski (2001). The SERVQUAL model measures the quality (satisfaction) of the service by measuring the expectations clients have of the service and the actual perception by clients of the service. The Customer Decision-Making model focuses on the different phases a customer goes through when making the decision to acquire a product or service.

2.1 SERVQUAL Model

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1988), is a framework for the strategic analysis of the customer's needs in relation to the quality of the service (see Figure 1). The essence of the model is that quality is defined as the difference between the service the customer expects and the service the customer experiences. If the service does not meet the expectations there is a quality deficiency, in other words, a gap (Smidts, 1993). The model distinguishes five different gaps. The fifth gap is the resultant of the four other gaps.

Gap 1: The company has an inaccurate view of the expectations of the client;

Gap 2: The expectations of the client are not translated in explicit guidelines and specifications;

Gap 3: The services are not delivered at the desired level;

Gap 4: The external communication is not in line with the actual service delivered;

Gap 5: The resultant - the difference between the expected and experienced service, measured by customer satisfaction (Berry et al, 1988).

The quality of service is based on five dimensions:

Dimension 1: Tangibles - facilities, tools, personal and written material

Dimension 2: Reliability - ability to provide the promised service

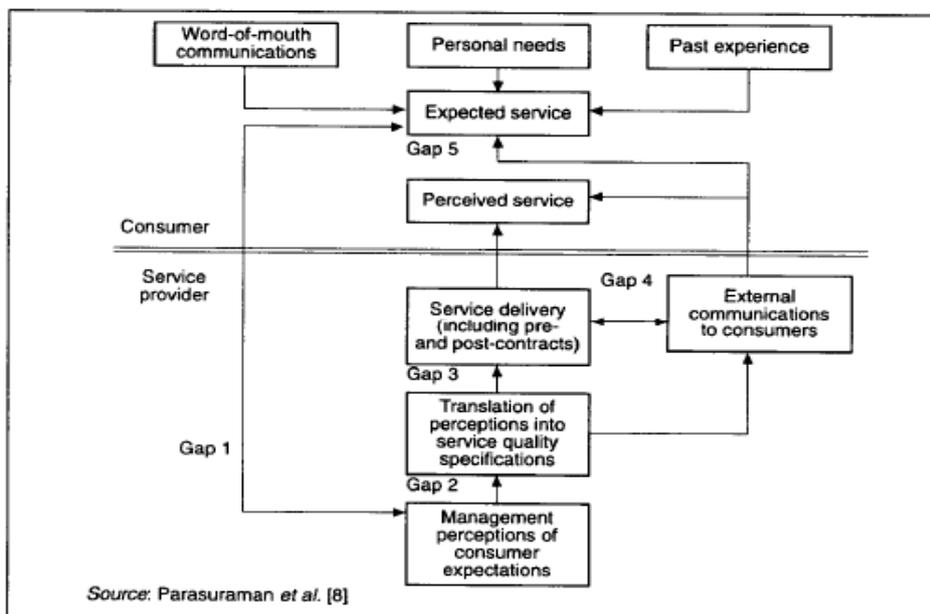
Dimension 3: Responsiveness - willingness to help consumers and provide a fast service

Dimension 4: Assurance - knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire confidence

Dimension 5: Empathy - the extent to which you give caring and individualized attention to a customer (Berry et al., 1988).

A standard validated questionnaire with 22 questions based on these five dimensions is used to measure how the client experiences the quality of the organization (Berry et al, 1988) (see Appendix IV). A Dutch translation of these 22 questions can be found in Appendix V (Lemmink, 1993). Both the perception and expectations are measured with the help of these 22 questions. Next to this participants need to divide 100 points among these five dimensions in order of importance. The quality/satisfaction is the perception of the service minus the expectation of the service.

Figure 1 SERVQUAL Model



Source: Berry et al. (1988).

The SERVQUAL model is a well-known model and is applied to a lot of different services. For instance in the health sector the SERVQUAL model is used to measure the quality of hospital services (Babakus & Mangold, 1992). In a research by Kouthouris & Alexandris in 2005 the SERVQUAL model was used to measure the service quality of the sport tourism industry; it was also used e.g. in another study to explore tourists' perceptions of hotel operations (Juwaheer, 2004). Important to note is that the



model is also applied in studies related to schools: in a study by Tan & Kek (2004) the service quality in higher education is measured based on the SERVQUAL model.

Interesting is, that the model is also used quite often in business-to-business (B2B) settings, as is also the case in this present study: SME Advies/Eco-Schools The Netherlands provides a programme for schools. In a study by Durvasula, Lysonski, and Mehta (1999), the SERVQUAL scale has been tested in the business-to-business sector. Their conclusion is that the SERVQUAL model, that was designed for customer services, can also be applied to business-to-business marketing. One needs to be cautious however and apply where needed to the issue at stake as situations can differ strongly and what is suitable for one research does not have to be suitable for another research.

The above shows that the model can be applied to a wide range of different services, thus also to the Eco-Schools programme. Besides the issues SME Advies wishes to address (how to support schools that joined the Eco-Schools programme, how to keep schools continuing with the Eco-Schools program after having obtained the flag, and how to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools) it is useful to gain knowledge from people who are involved and currently experiencing the Eco-Schools programme - to hear their side of the story. Hence, the SERVQUAL Model is a useful model to gain understanding of and assess customer satisfaction of the Eco-Schools programme.

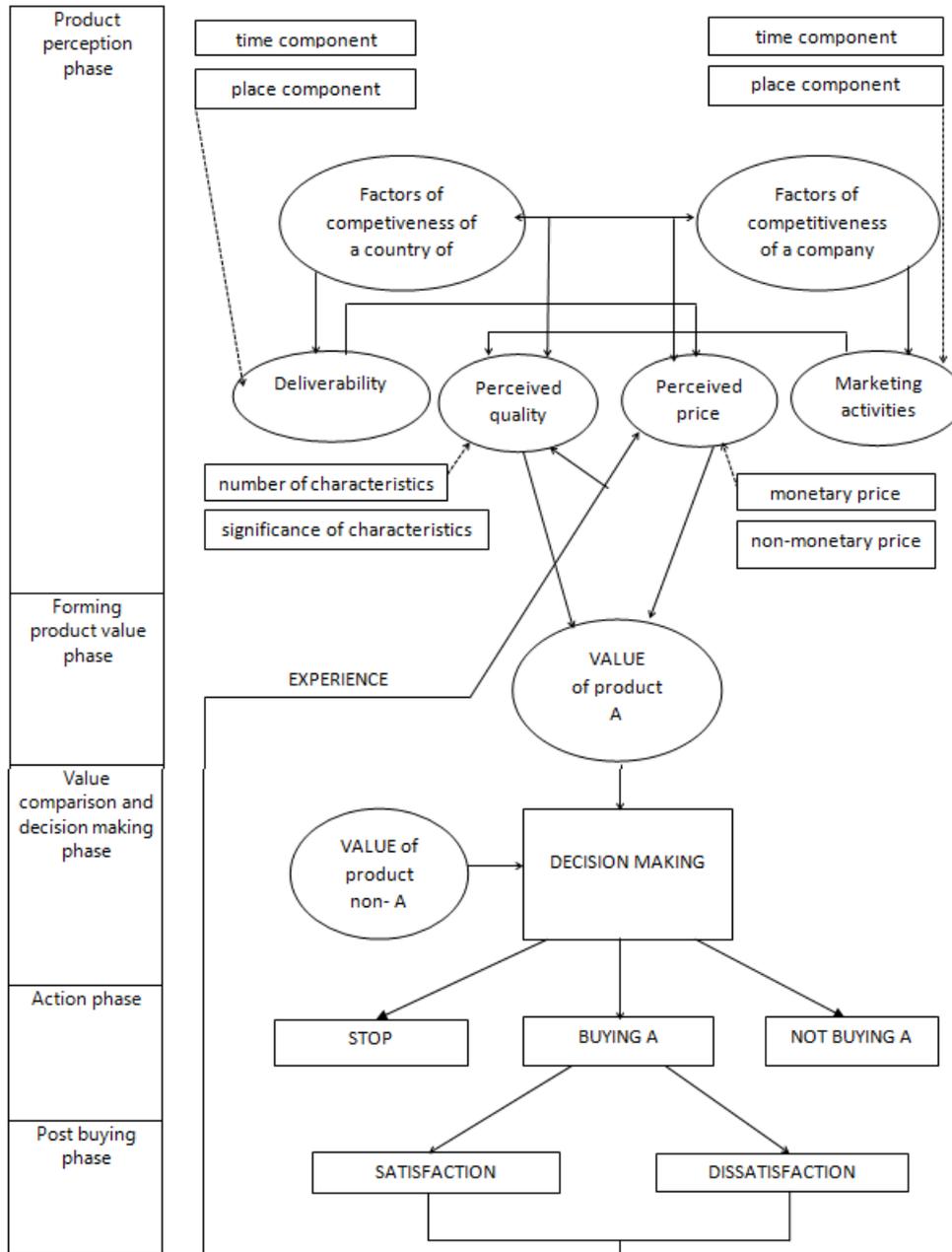
2.2 Customer Decision-Making Model

The model of Customer Decision-Making proposed by Dubrovski (2001) is used to gain a better understanding of the phases a customer goes through. The customer decision-making model consists of three phases: pre-buying, buying and post-buying, in essence similar to the three phases identified as core for this research: how to attract schools, how to involve them and how to keep them involved in the Eco-Schools programme.

These three phases are refined by Dubrovski into in five phases which a buyer goes through when deciding to acquire a product or service (see Figure 2). These five phases are:

1. Product perceiving phase
2. Value estimation phase
3. Comparing alternatives phase
4. Action phase
5. Post buying phase

Figure 2 The Customer Decision-Making Model



Source: Dubrovski (2001).

In the first phase 'product perceiving' the company tries to convince customers to acquire its product. In the second phase 'value estimation' the relation between the perceived price/quality plays an important role. The customer weighs the benefits and sacrifices of acquiring a product or service. In



the third phase 'comparing alternatives', the customer looks at other products or services that could also solve the problem and compares these. In the fourth phase 'action', the customer decides whether to acquire the product or service. This decision is based on the preceding three phases. The fifth phase 'post buying', is all about the customers' level of satisfaction with the service or product. Of course the more satisfied the customer is the more value the customer attaches to the product or service (Dubrovski, 2001).

This Customer Decision-Making Model and similar models have been used in various studies. For instance in a study by Foret & Procházka (2006) who researched the behaviour and decision making of Czech consumers when buying beverages. Another study examines the decision making by consumers in online shopping environments in relation to the effects of interactive decision aids (Häubl & Trifts, 1999). Both studies had relevant findings resulting in advices for improvement.

To apply the customer decision-making model to the Eco-Schools programme will be beneficial as it presents the phases a customer goes through when acquiring a certain service. This is of relevance as it analyzes the thinking process of a consumer per phase. Different issues could be at stake per phase.

2.3 Application of the SERVQUAL Model and the Customer Decision-Making Model to Eco-Schools

The SERVQUAL Model and the Customer Decision-Making Model serve as a basis for the research regarding Eco-Schools. Both models are modified and combined to serve the answering of the research questions.

2.3.1 Application of the SERVQUAL Model

The core aspect of the SERVQUAL Model - the quality of a service is measured by the performance minus expectation of customers toward a service - will be applied in this research. Gap 5, the resultant, is measured on the basis of the standard 22 question list which is based on the 5 dimensions. For Eco-Schools not all 5 dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, are that interesting as the dimensions and related questions per dimension are quite general. For this research it is more of relevance to ask questions that are directly linked to Eco-Schools. For this reason the five original dimensions are reduced to three 'new' dimensions for Eco-



Schools:

1. Information Services
2. Products and Tools
3. Guidance/Support

The first dimension 'Information Services' is an added dimension as in the original SERVQUAL this dimension does not exist. For Eco-Schools this is a very important dimension as it addresses aspects of the information services before a school has decided to participate. It is very important to see if there are gaps between the needs and actual perceived performance as this could lead to schools not joining the Eco-Schools programme.

The second dimension 'Products and Tools' is a modified version of 'tangibles'. In the original dimension, the related questions are about facilities at the work place and whether employees are dressed neatly. In the 'new' dimension tangibles refer to materials such as the seven step plan.

The third dimension 'Guidance/Support' is a merged dimension of the four other dimensions of the original SERVQUAL Model 'reliability', 'responsiveness', 'assurance' and 'empathy'. These four dimensions all address aspects that are related to the employees that deliver the service.

For all the three 'new' dimensions four or five statements will be asked. Further, just as in the original SERVQUAL Model, weights need to be attached to the different dimensions. Except for now, one needs to divide the 100 points among three instead of five dimensions. So, in essence, the structure and way of assessing remains the same but adaptations are made to the dimensions.

Further, for the research on Eco-Schools it is more useful to change the word 'expectations' into 'needs'. Because, all schools have naturally high expectations and the degree of needs can differ.

2.3.2 Application of the Customer Decision-Making Model

The Customer Decision-Making Model (Dubrovski, 2001) distinguishes five different phases a customer goes through when deciding to buy a certain service: 1. Product perceiving phase, 2. Value estimation phase, 3. Comparing alternatives phase, 4. Action phase, and 5. Post buying phase. These phases are adjusted into four phases to fit the journey schools goes through with Eco-Schools.

The four different 'new' phases are:

Phase 1: Orientation;

Phase 2: Decision making;



Phase 3: Active involvement, and;

Phase 4: Continuation.

The first phase 'Orientation' is the same as phase 1 'Product perceiving' of the original model. In this phase schools are orienting themselves and the first contact is made between the schools and Eco-Schools. In this phase Eco-Schools tries to convince schools to acquire the service: the eco-schools programme.

The second phase 'Decision making' consists in fact of the three phases 'Value estimation', 'Comparing alternatives' and 'Action' of the original model. These phases have been combined as a school takes the value estimation of the service and other alternatives into account when making the decision (action) to join Eco-Schools or not. This phase focuses particularly on the reasons to join and the considerations not to join Eco-Schools.

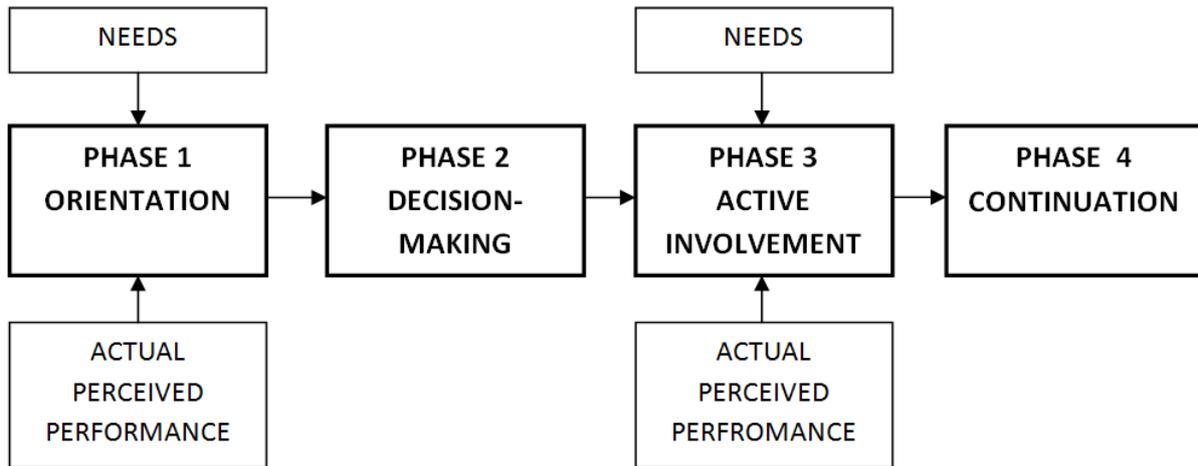
The third phase 'Active involvement' is essentially phase five 'Post-buying' of the original model. This phase concerns the customers' level of satisfaction with the service or product. Thus in this case how the schools experience the Eco-Schools programme.

The fourth phase 'Continuation' belongs as well to phase five 'Post-buying' , and in essence goes one step further. Here the difference between buying a product and buying a subscription is at issue. Namely to re-buy the service (after two years when having obtained the green flag). This phase focuses on the reasons to continue with Eco-Schools and considerations not to continue with the programme.

2.3.3 Combination of the application models to Eco-Schools

By combining the application of the SERVQUAL Model and the application of the Customer Decision-Making model a model applicable to Eco-Schools is constructed. Below in Figure 3 the proposed model is visualized. Further elaboration in terms of questions will be addressed in chapter 4.2.1 Survey.

Figure 3. Proposed Model Eco-schools



* Dimension 1 Information Services is assessed in phase 1

** Dimension 2 Product and Tools and Guidance/Support are assessed in phase 3

Important to note is that the phases are linked to the three questions of the client:

Phase 1 and 2 - How to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools?

Phase 3 - How to support schools who joined Eco-Schools?

Phase 4 - How to keep schools continuing with the Eco-Schools program after having obtained the flag?



3. PROBLEM DEFINITION

From the introduction and theoretical framework the following is derived:

Research objective:

To gain insight into and assess the customer satisfaction of the Eco-Schools program in order to formulate recommendations for improvement.

Main research question:

What are the main drivers for schools to become or not and continue or discontinue with the Eco-Schools programme based on expected and perceived actual performance of the Eco-Schools programme?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the needs of schools of the Eco-Schools programme during the orientation phase?
2. How do schools evaluate the performance of the Eco-Schools programme during the orientation phase?
3. Does the Eco-Schools programme meet the needs of schools during the orientation phase?
4. What are reasons for schools to either join or not to join the Eco-Schools programme?
5. What are the needs of schools of the Eco-Schools programme during the active involvement phase?
6. How do schools evaluate the performance of the Eco-Schools programme during the active involvement phase?
7. Does the Eco-Schools programme meet the needs of schools during the active involvement phase?
8. What are the reasons to continue or discontinue with Eco-Schools in the continuation phase?

Above findings will be used to formulate recommendations for improvement in customers relations for Eco-Schools. The recommendations are presented in chapter 7 Advisory report.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sampling

Since April 2004, 86 schools were involved with Eco-Schools (see Appendix VI). This is a combination of primary, secondary, preparatory secondary) vocational education (VMBO), and international schools. The group intermediate education includes schools that provide secondary and VMBO schools.

The population size for the research is 86 (as 86 schools are involved). Of these 86 schools 33 responded and form the basis for the research. The sample size is thus 33.

For the survey all four interviewees responded. In order to retrieve the (email) addresses the database of SME Advies was used.

4.1.1 Response

As mentioned before, a total of 33 responded to the questionnaire which gives a response rate of 38% (33/86). It must be noted that 26 of these surveys were filled in completely. The questions in the beginning of the survey filled in by the drop-outs are used in the research, as these are still of relevance. Reasons why they were not filled in completely are not clear. The questionnaires were constructed in such a way that all respondents could answer all the questions independently of which phase they are in. All schools are either in the active-involvement phase or in the continuation phase.

In order to increase the response, respondents could win one of three green Doppers (see Appendix XVI). Also, a reminder was sent one week later.

In the survey itself the number of questions were restricted as much as possible. For instance, questions or statements belonging to the same item were put together as one question. Moreover, during the time respondents were filling in the survey a bar at the top of each page showed how far they were. Also, open questions in the survey were not required to be filled in. This was expected to diminish the drop-out once respondents started to fill in the survey.

To see whether the schools of the sample have the same distribution as the schools in the population it is looked at the type of school and which step the school is at that moment.

Table 1 Distribution of school types in original population and survey

	Original population (n)	Survey population(n)	Original population(%)	Survey population (%)
Type of school				
Primary School	32	9	37	35
Secondary School	27	9	31	35
Vocational Education School*	23	6	27	23
International	4	2	5	8
Total	86	26	100	101

*Secondary and vocational education schools combined

From table 1 it is shown that the survey more or less reflects the distribution of the original population.

Table 2 overview 7-step plan school (population and sample)

	Original population (n) *	Survey population (n)	Original population (%)	Survey population (%)
Seven Step Plan				
Intention	46	3	53	12
Step 1 – Eco-Team	5	1	6	4
Step 2 – Sustainability scan	4	0	5	0
Step 3 – Action	2	6	2	23
Step 4 – Monitoring and Evaluation	2	2	2	8
Sub total	59	12	68	47
Step 5 – Curriculum	4	3	5	12
Step 6 – Inform and involve	3	0	3	0
Step 7 – Eco-code	0	2	0	8
Green Flag	8	1	9	4
Continuation	12	8	14	31
Sub total	27	14	31	55
TOTAL	86	26	99	102

*Schools that have obtained the bronze certificate are put in step 5 and schools that have obtained the silver certificate are put in phase 6

There is a discrepancy between the original population and the distribution of the say, in the sense that the schools in the initial phases are somewhat unrepresented and those the following phases are slightly over represented. It is assumed that this does not effect the results.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this study: a survey is distributed and in-depth interviews are held. This has been a strategic decision. Due to the limited amount of time to conduct the research it was decided to conduct a survey and send this to all 86 participating schools. Other reasons were the relatively low costs and minimizing the chances that respondents would provide socially desirable answers in absence of anonymity. The survey serves as a tool to gather a general view of schools opinion on Eco-Schools. Nonetheless, it remains important for the sake of the research to gain more and in-depth information in order to understand the underlying reasons of the general information. Therefore also a few interviews were held.

Moreover combining data has multiple advantages. The qualitative data provide a deep understanding of survey responses, and statistical analysis can provide detailed assessment of patterns of responses. All questions are based on the proposed research model for Eco-Schools.

The data of both the survey and in-depth interviews are gathered at the same time, in order words, parallel data gathering is applied. Further, a component design is used as the data are collected independently and afterwards combined for interpretation and conclusion.

4.2.1 Survey

The survey is based on the theoretical framework for Eco-Schools and consequently based on the three questions SME Advies wishes to address (see Figure 3). The survey consists of 24 questions (see appendix VII) and has open and closed questions. Schools can be divided on the basis of the four phases. All schools in this case, are in either phase 3 or 4, as they all have decided to start with the Eco-Schools programme. Regardless the phase they are in all questions (Q) can be answered.

Table 3 Construct Survey

Original questions of SME	How to attract schools		How to support joined schools	How to keep schools
PHASES TYPE QUESTION	PHASE 1 Orientation	PHASE 2 Decision - Making	PHASE 3 Active Involvement	PHASE 4 Continuation
Needs	Q2		Q8, 9, 11	
Actual perceived performance	Q2, 3		Q8, 9, 12, 13, 14	
General	Q1, 4, 19	Q5, 6, 7, 19	Q10, 18, 19	Q 15,16,17,19

Questions 20 through 24 were concerned with basic information on respondents. The questions per phase are highlighted in the following part.

Orientation phase

In the first phase schools are orienting themselves. First a question was asked how the schools came in touch with Eco-Schools. Then the needs and actual perceived performance regarding information services (dimension 1) were assessed. Five statements were put to see how the item information services was assessed. In order to check the internal consistency of these statements, the Cronbach's alpha test was executed and showed that the Cronbach's alpha was 0,822. This gives an indication that the quality of the scale is good.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,822	5

Hereafter, to check the outcome of the needs and actual performance it was asked how satisfied schools were with the Eco-Schools programme. Then a question was posed if the respondent had any suggestions for improvement regarding the information services.

Decision making phase

In the second phase schools are deciding and therefore reasons are asked why schools decide to join Eco-Schools and any doubts they may have had while taking the decision to join Eco-Schools. Also a question is posed what Eco-Schools could do to contribute to a positive decision by schools to decide

to join the Eco-Schools program.

Active involvement phase

In the third phase schools have actually joined the programme and here the needs and actual perceived performance of Products and Tools (dimension 2) and Guidance/Support (dimension 3) are assessed. Here again four respectively five statements were posed to measure these items. For both the Cronbach's alpha test was executed and that showed that the Cronbach's alpha for the scale products and tools was 0,831 and the Cronbach's alpha for support/guidance was 0,890. This indicates that the quality of both scales is good.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,831	5

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,890	4

Then a question was posed if the respondents had any tips to improve the guidance/support of the Eco-Schools programme. This was not asked for the products and tools as these cannot be changed that easily.

In order to get an indication which dimension respondents attached greatest value to, it was asked to divide 100 points over the three dimensions (information services - orientation phase, products and tools - active involvement phase, and support/guidance - active involvement phase).

In order to obtain some more information on how the schools experience the seven-step plan statements were posed per phase on how they experienced it.

To gain more in-depth information on their experiences it was asked if the respondents could state some positive and negative experiences (if they had any). And if they had negative experiences, suggestions on how to prevent these from happening.

Continuation phase

In the fourth phase schools are considering to continue or discontinue with the programme, therefore the underlying reasons for their final decision are asked. Also it is asked whether schools think they will continue with the Eco-Schools programme or not.

General

Here it was asked in what way schools would like to come in contact with other schools to exchange experiences. This question also belongs to the active involvement phase. Then a question was posed if they had any further comments about Eco-Schools. This question actually belongs to all the phases.

Lastly, general information was asked such as Q21: 'which function do you have within the Eco-Schools program?'. These questions were purposely asked at the end of the survey for two reasons: 1. If respondents drop out at the end, previous (more important) questions can still be analysed 2. Respondents are less likely to drop out as general questions are easy to fill in.

4.2.2 In- Depth Interviews

Next to the survey five in-depth interviews were held. Four of these with the purpose of exploring issues or topics in more detail. These four interviews are based on the four different school types (primary, secondary, intermediate and international schools) and serve as subgroups/strata. Simple random sampling is applied per strata and one person per school type is interviewed.

Out of these five interviews three were held via telephone and by one face to face conversation. During interviews respondents are more inclined to give answers on certain questions (low item non response) compared to the survey. The disadvantage is that it is very time consuming and comes with extra costs. For this reason also telephone interviews were held.

Semi structured interviews are held which means that a pre-determined set of questions was used (see Appendix IX) as guidance for the interview but with the freedom to expand on other topics. The construct of the questionnaires is in line with the order of questions of the survey (per phase).

The fifth interview had another reason, namely to gain insight in how far this research is cross-organisational. An interview was held with a teacher from a UNESCO school. Preliminary findings of the research were discussed in order to assess whether it could be applied to other schools.



All interviews were recorded and later on transcripts were made (see Appendix XI). In return for their contribution, all interviewees received a foldable bottle with Eco-School sticker (see appendix XV).

4.3 Data Analysis

4.3.1 Tools & instruments for analysis

Participants completed the survey between 2 and 14 April 2014. Anonymity was assured. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete, and participants had the opportunity to call and discuss any question at all times during the survey administration.

The data collection was done online via Survey Monkey. For the analyses of the survey Survey Monkey as well as SPSS was used. Paired Samples was executed to analyze difference between groups and expectations and performance. Cronbach's alpha test was executed to measure the reliability of the scales.

No special program was used to analyze the interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were put together and linked to each question. Every sentence in the transcripts were marked with different colours linking to each phase. In this way the results could be combined and compared in an efficient way .

4.3.2 Reliability

Reliability can be described as the extent to which a measurement yields the same results each time it is used. In order to enhance the reliability of this study the following items have been taken into account:

A population size of 86 with a sample size of 33 and a confidence level of 95% gives a confidence interval of 13.47. As can be seen in table 1 distribution of types of schools in sample is representative for population. As can be seen in table 2 distribution of steps, relatively many schools in phase 3 and continuation. The sample seems to have an adequate fit to the population, but because of the small sample size, there is some uncertainty in the outcomes, so interpretation should be done with care.

Triangulated design: The study uses two different methods: survey and in-depth interviews. The survey and in-depth interview questions complement each other and will in this way enhance the reliability. It also checks if the results from one method are congruent to another.

Standardization: A standardized questionnaire is designed combined with the Likert scale. A few questions are randomized in order to minimize the order-effect as answers could be influenced by the order in which the questions are presented. Applied where possible.

Internal consistency: For the quantitative part of the research a statistical test, Cronbach's alpha (α), is applied to check the homogeneity of a set of questions. Cronbach's α is a coefficient of the internal consistency of items. Cronbach's α measures to which extent these questions regarding the same item have the same answer. For Eco-Schools this test has been executed three times namely for the items information services, products and tools and guidance/support. All three the scales are internal consistent, in other words, reliable (reference made to Appendix).

Reporting and justification: A logbook is kept in which all decisions, progress and points learned are noted. Also, extensive transcripts are made.

4.3.3 Validity

Whereas quantitative measures methods aim mostly at reliability (that is, consistency and retesting) through the use of tools such as standardized questionnaires, qualitative methods score more highly on validity, by getting at how people really behave and what people actually mean when they describe their experiences, attitudes, and behaviours.

Validity can be described as the extent to which a measurement truly reflects the reality – free of systematic errors. There are three forms of validity that will be addressed in this study:

1. *Internal validity* – the extent to which 'correct' conclusions from the study can be drawn for the research group. Internal validity is affected by flaws within the study itself such as not controlling some of the major variables (a design problem), or problems with the research instrument (a data collection problem).

One factor that could affect the internal validity in this study is desirable answers. To minimize this, during the interviews, it is explained that the interview will be anonymous. This provides neutrality, detachment and reassurance. Next to this, the interviewer makes clear that he/she is open to any answer of the interviewee, no judging in the intonation, and nudge where necessary.



Concerning the survey this threat is even more diminished. The survey as well as the interview is anonymous. Moreover, the researcher has less influence on the answers of the participants than via an interview. Different way of asking (intonation, word-structure, etc.) is not at stake via a survey and so increases the correctness of answers. The wording, context and sequence of questions are taken into account. Besides, for questions 5,6,15 and 16 randomization is applied. This in order to reduce bias.

Important to not is that the questions are based on the SERVQUAL model. This model is widely used in research.

Peer examination: The survey and question list of the in-depth interview was checked before by a few colleagues before it was distributed. Likewise the results and findings were peer reviewed. Also the questions were reviewed by an expert in research.

One disadvantage of the research is that it is a snapshot. If something happens in the environment and the participant fills in 'incorrect' answers this will go unnoticed and wrong conclusions could be drawn.

2. External validity – the extent to which the results can be generalized to the population (other situations and people). An inaccuracy that could take place is that those who fill in the survey are already more positive toward Eco-Schools and so inclined to give positive answers.

Further, a threat to the external validity is under coverage. This could occur if for instance only primary schools filled in the survey. In this study this is not the case as all school types are represented and has a similar distribution as the original population (see table 3).

This enhances the external validity of the research. Suffusion occurs when people fill in the survey who are not linked to Eco-Schools. The results indicate (looking at the general questions of the survey) that all respondents are linked to Eco-Schools. Of course it cannot be determined whether respondents fill in the survey as if they are linked, but this is not likely to happen. Especially, taking into account the amount of time a respondent is busy with filling in the survey.

The external validity is enhanced by using the participants list of schools that are involved in Eco-Schools from the database of SME Advies/Eco-Schools The Netherlands. Using this specific list ensures that the right email addresses are found.

5. RESULTS

This chapter shows the results¹ of both the survey and in-depth interviews. The qualitative in-depth interviews complement the quantitative survey results. The results are presented for each of the four phases i.e.: orientation, decision-making, active involvement and continuation. The results of the sub-questions are answered within the phases. Lastly, findings of the cross-organizational aspect will be presented.

5.1 Phase 1: Orientation

The orientation phase is about how schools get acquainted with Eco-Schools and about the quality of the information services offered.

Chapter 5.1.2 Quality of information services concerns sub-research questions 1. What are the needs of schools during the orientation phase?, 2. How do schools evaluate the performance of the Eco-Schools programme during the orientation phase?, and 3. Does the Eco-Schools programme meet the needs of schools during the orientation phase?. The results will be given per sub-research question.

5.1.1 First contact

Schools were either approached by Eco-Schools (directly or indirectly) or schools found Eco-Schools by actively searching for information on sustainable schools.

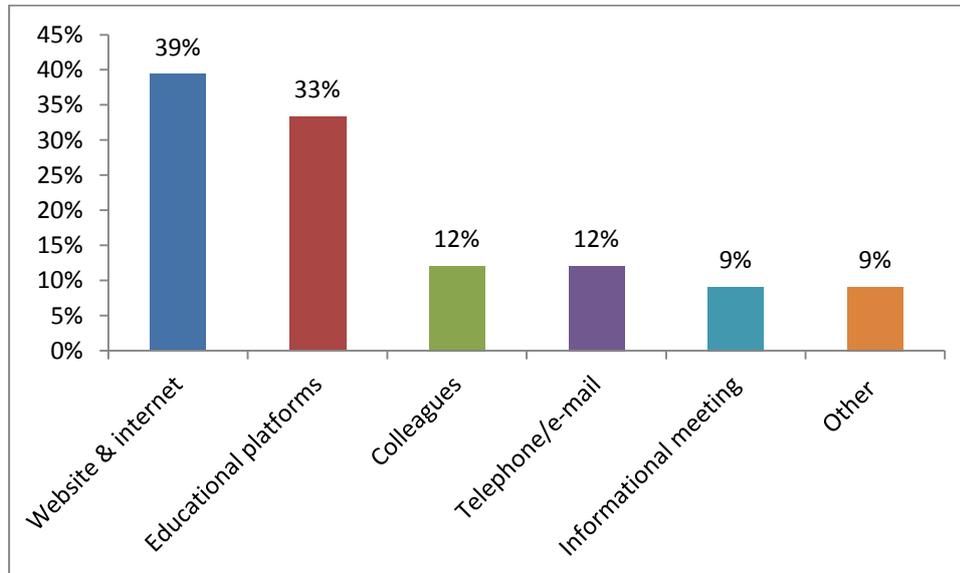
The in-depth interviews showed that before the start of participation in Eco-Schools there were already motivated person(s) such as teachers, who wished for a greener school. In some cases sustainability was also already stated in the mission and vision of the school. In the search to find programmes and tools to organise sustainability activities, Eco-Schools was encountered.

Regarding the survey, figure 4 shows that nearly 40% of the respondents of the survey got to know of the existence of Eco-Schools through website and internet. One-third of the respondents came into contact with the program through educational platforms or umbrella organisations such as AOC Council (English translation, Agrarian Education Centre). These umbrella organisations had been contacted by Eco-Schools and had in turn informed the member schools, and stimulated them to join.

¹ Answer categories have been redefined on the basis of the answers of the respondents.

None of the respondents of the survey nor the interviewees came to know about the programme via social media.

Figure 4. First contact with Eco-Schools (n =33)



5.1.2 Quality of information services

To get an general idea of how schools experience the information services of Eco-Schools, respondents were asked if they in general were satisfied with the information services. By far the majority of the respondents of the survey (84%) were satisfied with the information services provided by Eco-Schools in the orientation phase. A quote of the comments of the survey: "very friendly and helpful staff".

To gather further insight on the quality of information services the questions were asked on website, brochure, telephone/mail contact, presentation and registration process.

Sub question1 Needs Information Services

The following results are from the survey. Table 4 shows that respondents are most in need of staff of Eco-Schools that can answer them well via telephone or mail. Respondents indicate that they are not so much in need of the brochure of SME Advies. The mean of 4,02 shows that respondents in general agree that they are in need of the information services of Eco-Schools.

Table 4 Ranked needs of schools of Information Services

Ranking Needs Information Services	Mean*	%**
The questions I had were well answered by telephone or mail	4,40	88
The presentation of Eco-Schools at my school was good	3,78	79
The website of Eco-Schools gives me a clear view of Eco-Schools	4,18	76
The registration process is clear and easy	4,15	70
The brochure of Eco-Schools is of added value to understand Eco-Schools better	3,61	54
Total information services	4,02	

* Not applicable is left out in the calculation (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

** The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable.

Sub question 2 Actual perceived performance information services

Table 5. shows that 89% of the respondents perceive the reply to questions by telephone as good. The least satisfied are the respondents with the brochure.

Table 5. Ranking actual perceived performance of information services

Ranking Actual Perceived Performance of Information Services	%*
The questions I had were well answered by telephone or mail	89
The presentation of Eco-Schools at my school was good	79
The website of Eco-Schools gives me a clear view of Eco-Schools	77
The registration process is clear and easy	68
The brochure of Eco-Schools is of added value to understand Eco-Schools better	55

*The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable. (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

Sub question 3 Needs and actual perceived performance of information services congruent?

Subsequently a comparison was made between the needs for information and the actual performance by Eco-schools as perceived by the respondents. Out of the paired samples test it became clear that the perceived actual implementation of Eco-Schools generally met the information needs of the respondents and hence that the quality can be considered as good. For more info see appendix XIII.

5.1.3. Suggestions from respondents

Though the information services of Eco-Schools in this orientation phase were generally appreciated, there is always room for improvement. The respondents in both in-depth interviews and survey, came up with suggestions to ameliorate the information service: (For the complete list of suggestions given reference made to appendix VIII).

- Contact person: Several respondents liked to have a contact person closer to school;
- National media: Involvement of national media to raise awareness on Eco-Schools;
- Be clear on the finances: Information on costs of participating should be made more clear;
- Interschool co-operation and networking: Stimulation of the role of schools who are already involved in Eco Schools in order to kindle enthusiasm for and inform on the programme;
- PR materials: Production of more PR materials, such as posters and door signs;
- English: More information should be translated into English for the benefit of international schools.

5.2 Phase 2: Decision-Making

Following the orientation phase, the actual decision has to be made by the school whether to join Eco-Schools or not. This involves in essence weighing the pros and cons of joining the program, but naturally depends also on personal ideology and opinion of teachers and staff members.

Questions were asked about what at that time the reasons were to join Eco-Schools as well as what the possible considerations were not to join Eco-Schools. Respondents were also asked suggestions on what in this stage could be improved by Eco-Schools to convince schools to participate.

This gives answer to sub-question 4: What are the reasons for schools to either join or not to join the Eco-Schools programme?

5.2.1 Reasons to join Eco-Schools

The interviewees regarded the Eco-School programme on the one hand flexible enough to allow for differences in ambition and priorities of the school but on the other hand giving needed structure, goals and deadlines. Moreover Eco-Schools was seen as easily accessible for participants.

Nearly all respondents of the survey joined Eco-Schools in order to embed sustainability in the



structure and curriculum of the school (see Figure 5)². "It provides more opportunities to take on important world issues like environmental change and really make it come alive".

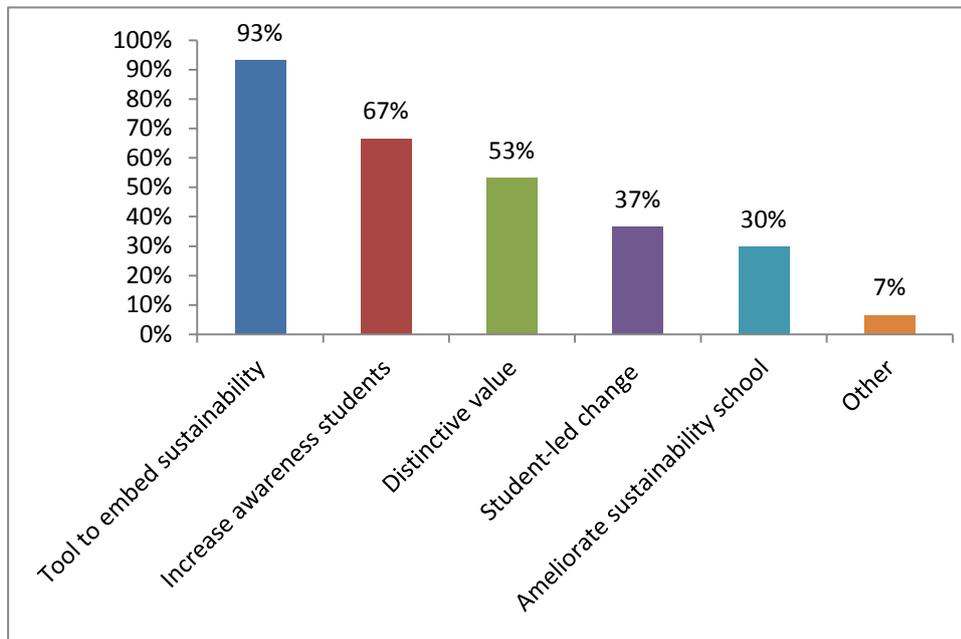
Apart from embedding sustainability in the school, another reason to participate, as mentioned by two-third of the respondents of the survey, is to increase the awareness of students of sustainability issues and of their ecological footprint. Mentioned by half of the respondents is that participating in the programme distinguishes their school positively from others, and could raise the status and popularity of the school. As one of the interviewees stated: "It is good publicity for our school. The green flag is waving on our roof". While most consider the PR aspect as one of the reasons to join, some are of the opinion that Eco-School should not stress this and focus more on content and participation.

Out of all respondents of the survey only one mentioned the reduction in energy, water and waste disposal costs as one of the reasons to participate in the programme. From the in-depth interviews it was clear that even though costs might not be the prime reason to join Eco-Schools, it for sure was regarded as a nice side benefit. Quoting two interviewees: "It saved our school money because we have learned how to buy fewer materials and re-use things" and "plastic is reused, good for the environment and we don't use that many waste containers anymore, which saves us €200 per year. We can do more fun stuff with that than paying for waste disposal".

None of the respondents of the survey found involving the neighbourhood or the possibility of international contacts a reason to join Eco-Schools.

² Respondents could give multiple answers (max. 3) on this question.

Figure 5. Reasons to join Eco-Schools (n=30)



5.2.2 Considerations not to join Eco-Schools

Though the schools of the respondents eventually have all chosen to join Eco-Schools, the cons of the programme had at that time also been considered.

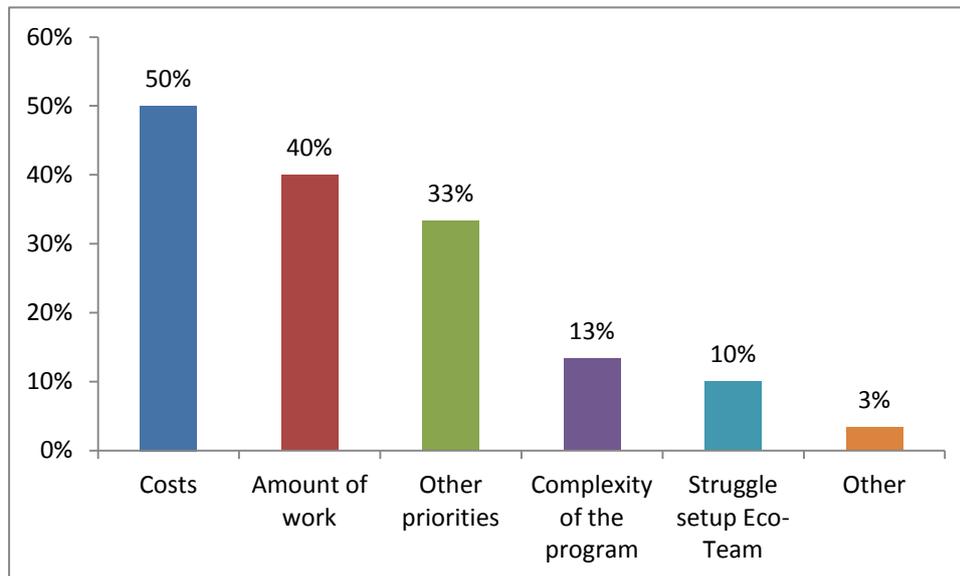
Main objection as put forward by the respondents both in the survey as well as in the in-depth interviews were the participation costs.^{3,4} This said, the interviewees understood that carrying out such a program requires funding. Important to note is that in countries like England, the Eco-Schools programme is financed by the government and all schools are obliged to join the programme.

Another problem foreseen from the survey was the amount of work involved. Furthermore some schools were in doubt whether to join or not as problems like bullying had to be dealt with too and actually had a higher priority.

³ Participation costs for two years are € 2500 for primary schools and € 5000 for secondary schools. If after this period schools decide to prolong costs are consecutively € 950 and € 1900 for the next two years. Small schools are eligible for a reduction of the price.

⁴ Respondents could give multiple answers (max. 3) on this question.

Figure 6. Considerations not to join Eco-Schools (n=30)



5.2.3 Suggestions by respondents

Respondents and interviewees belong all to schools that already have ample experience with the Eco-Schools programme. They were asked if they had any suggestions on what could be emphasized or could be organised differently by Eco-Schools in order to positively influence schools that are currently considering participation. Positive experiences, which are manifold, are included as input as well: (for the complete list of suggestions given reference is made to appendix VIII)

- Emphasize in contacts and PR material/website:
 - Simplicity;
 - Fun aspects;
 - Flexibility, possibility to set own goals and create own programmes;
 - Real life education possibilities, science etc becomes truly alive. For instance at one school the solar car team from Delft University came with the solar car to the school;
 - Cost reduction of the school by reducing energy and water bills;
 - (Financial) profits of better environment and ecology;
 - A more interesting curriculum;
 - Proud, enthusiastic and motivated students and teachers as outcome of the programme;
 - Provide tips and concrete examples on how to achieve sustainability in practice;
 - Student-led change, with incredible positive impact;
 - Creation of synergy;



- Be present at education markets;
- Ask schools the reason for not joining the program;
- Create general support for Eco-Schools within the school amongst others by informing and motivating the staff;
- Consider a flex-fee: for schools that need only minimal input, the fee should be less than for schools in want of more support by Eco-Schools.

5.3 Phase 3: Active Involvement

Once schools have decided to join Eco-Schools, the next phase is entered: the phase of active involvement. Respondents were asked questions about their experiences with the actual implementation and with product and tools, support and guidance, Seven Step Plan and again suggestions for improvement. Chapter 5.3.2 Quality of products and tools and chapter 5.3.4 Quality of support/guidance concerns sub-questions 5. What are the needs of schools during the orientation phase?, 6. How do schools evaluate the performance of the Eco-Schools programme during the orientation phase?, and 7. Does the Eco-Schools programme meet the needs of schools during the orientation phase?. The results will be given per sub-question.

5.3.1 General

Carrying out the programme as well as the administration takes energy and time which is sometimes not available. This factor also reduces sometimes the motivation of teachers to join the programme. Also parents tend to drop out if they know the extent of work which needs to be carried out. Much is expected from in particular the coordinator of the Eco-Team (integration in the curriculum, policy, reporting etc.). Moreover, planning of meetings in the busy schedule of staff/parents is not easy.

5.3.2 Quality of products and tools

In order for schools to implement the programme, several products and tools are provided by Eco-Schools. Out of these, a selection was made of those regarded by the researcher as most relevant i.e. the Seven Step Plan, sustainability scan, social media, website and certificates. Needs of schools for these products and tools and actual perceived implementation by the respondents were compared to get an idea of the quality of the services provided.

Sub question 5 Needs products and tools

Table 6. Ranking needs products and tools

Ranking Needs Products and Tools	Mean*	%**
The certificates bronze, silver, green flag are of added value	4,27	85
The sustainability scan is useful	4,38	84
The website of Eco-Schools Nederland offers sufficient information on Eco-Schools	4,15	75
The seven step plan is useful	4,23	74
Social media of Eco-Schools are of added value	3,81	63
Total Products and Tools	4,17	

* Not applicable is left out in the calculation (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

** The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable.

Table 6. shows that respondents are most in need of the certificates and the sustainability scan. From the in-depth interviews it is shown that the sustainability scan is really of added value.

Sub question 6 Actual perceived performance products and tools

Table 7. Ranking actual perceived performance products and tools

Ranking Actual perceived performance Products and Tools	%*
The certificates bronze, silver, green flag are of added value	81
The seven step plan is useful	77
The sustainability scan is useful	75
The website of Eco-Schools Nederland offers sufficient information on Eco-Schools	67
Social media of Eco-Schools are of added value	46

* The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable. (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

Table 7. shows that the respondents of the survey perceive the certificates as good, followed by the seven step plan and the sustainability scan. The respondents ranked social media as least good performed tool.

Sub question 7 Needs and actual perceived performance of products and tools congruent?

Hence, the overall quality of products and tools is good. This is true for all products and tools researched, but less so for social media. As the paired sample test demonstrates, the respondents are in want of more (quality) information via these media. It must be noted here however that out of five tools/products, respondents ranked social media as the one they were least in need of.

5.3.3 Seven Step Plan

In order to gain more knowledge on the experiences of the school with possibly the most important tool provided by Eco-Schools, the Seven Step Plan, extra questions were asked to rate the easiness or difficulty of every step of the plan.

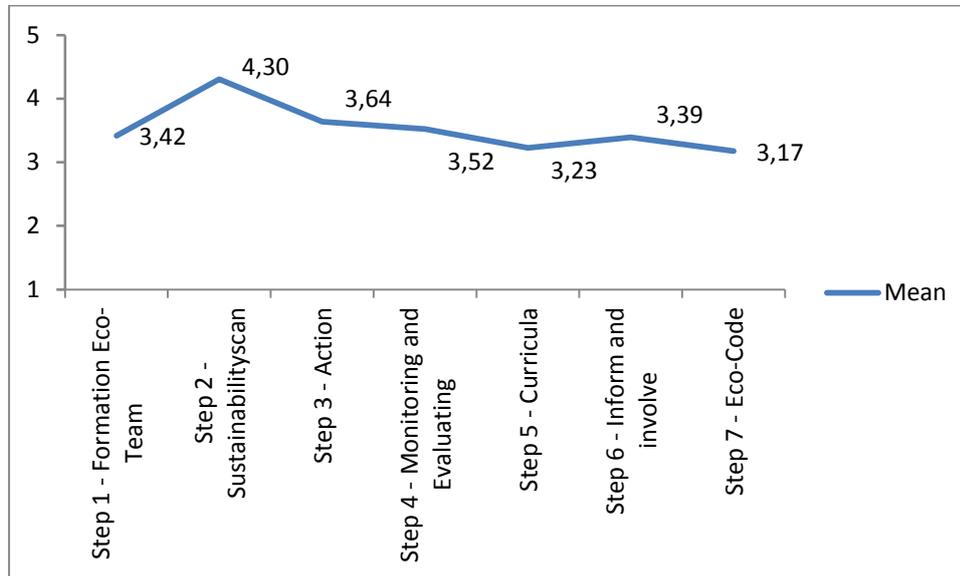
Figure 7. shows that on average the respondents did find the various steps neither very easy nor very difficult. This is also true for the first step, the formation of the Eco-Team. Only one respondent and one interviewee indicated that the formation was laborious.

The sustainability scan, the second step, is generally experienced as the most easy step. Out of the in-depth interviews it appeared that the scan is also considered as very useful by the interviewees. "That was our guiding force, every time we renew we look at the scan and yeah I think it is really important". "I found the sustainability scan really good as the students had something to do right away".

From this step onwards, respondents experienced the steps as more difficult. The last step, designing and making the Eco-code, was found most difficult.

Out of the in-depth interviews it came forward that step 5, integration of sustainability issues in the curriculum, is not completely suitable for secondary and intermediate schools. There are more classes, more lectures, and more learning paths in these intermediate schools than in primary schools. As one of the interviewees stated: "the structure is good but the lay-out is just not good enough. (...) In my eyes it is more about competences of a student rather than e.g. a waste project that you can tick off".

Figure 7. Opinion on Seven Step Plan



1. Very difficult 2. Difficult 3. Nor easy/difficult 4. Easy 5. Very easy

From the in-depth interviews it showed that the formation of the Eco-Team is done via different ways. Two interviewees asked students to write motivation letters (see Appendix XIII).

5.3.4 Quality of support/guidance

In order to measure quality of support and guidance for the participating school, respondents were asked their opinion on knowledge, willingness to help, prompt service and personal attention of Eco-Schools' staff.

Sub question 5 Needs of support/guidance

Table 8. shows that the respondents of the survey are in need of personal attention. They are in least need of support/guidance.

Table 8. Needs support/guidance ranking

Needs Support/Guidance Ranking	Mean*	%**
Personal attention to your school could be expected from Eco-Schools	4,36	85
Employees of Eco-Schools have the knowledge to answer your questions	4,28	73
Employees of Eco-Schools are always willing to help your school	4,23	70
Employees of Eco-Schools deliver a direct service	4,12	59
Total support/guidance	4,25	

* Not applicable is left out in the calculation (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

** The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable.

Sub question 6 Actual perceived performance of guidance/support

Table 9. below indicates that respondents perceive that Eco-Schools is willing to help. The personal attention though is ranked as least well perceived.

Table 9. Actual perceived performance support/guidance ranking

Actual perceived performance Support/Guidance Ranking	%*
Employees of Eco-Schools are always willing to help your school	88
Employees of Eco-Schools have the knowledge to answer your questions	76
Employees of Eco-Schools deliver a direct service	72
Personal attention to your school could be expected from Eco-Schools	63

* The statements that were answered by agree and strongly are added up and divided among the total number of response minus the response of the answer option not applicable. (from score 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree)

Sub question 7 Needs and actual perceived performance of guidance/support congruent?

The respondents appeared to be in need of support and guidance from Eco-Schools and the paired sample test showed that most needs were met. One need was not fully met however; personal attention. One interviewee in particular was not pleased: "I found it rather worthless, .. therefore tried to exchange tips with other schools". See Appendix XII for further explanation.

5.3.5 Suggestions of respondents

Respondents of the survey were asked in what ways Eco-Schools could improve its support and guidance and what the schools themselves can do to improve the implementation. Summarized below are the relevant suggestions made by respondents: (for the complete list of suggestions given reference is made to appendix VIII)

- Eco-Schools should provide ready-to-use lesson material (as well as PowerPoint's, posters etc.) on the various sustainability themes;
- More in-between evaluation moments, carried out on frequent times;
- Online helpdesk/chat box;
- Regional meetings;
- Exchange ideas between schools (via website or congress);
- Improve methods for intermediate education institutions (clear distinction between vocational sustainability skills and general knowledge and skills in sustainability);
- Make contributions of students immediately visible and communicate this internally and externally at all levels of the organisation and connect it to the developments of the school, e.g. canteen, playground;
- Use popular kids to attract and involve other children;
- Providing certificates for children who are involved in Eco-Schools;
- Communication should, as in the English programme, not be one of the themes, communication about sustainability is an integral part of Eco-Schools in all seven steps;
- More attention should be paid to global activity (could be another theme), i.e. activities here have impacts on conditions elsewhere;
- Focus on increasing competence and skills of pupils and teachers;
- Communication must not be considered only as a PR tool, but should be more about involving neighbourhood and raising awareness;
- Use recycled material (e.g. no plastic Eco-School pens).



5.4 Phase 4. Continuation

The continuation phase is the final phase where schools decide whether to continue or discontinue with Eco-Schools. These results answer sub-question 8. What are the reasons to continue or discontinue with Eco-Schools in the continuation phase?

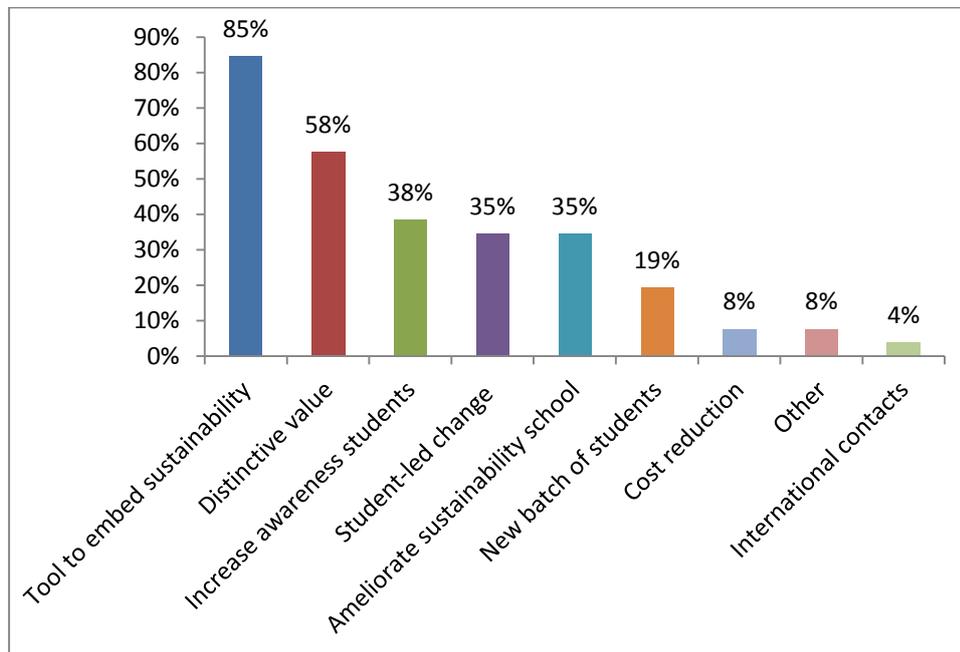
5.4.1 Reasons to continue with Eco-Schools

Nearly all respondents (92%) indicate that their school will continue with Eco-Schools. Some quotes of the interviewees are: "Yeah, the green flag, we can't stop now! We see the green flag really as the kick off. It is just the beginning (..) The challenge is to consolidate what we have accomplished and to expand." "From the top to the bottom we have a strong commitment now to be green" and "A beautiful tool to show what you stand for" are some comments from the in-depth interviews.

Figure 8, shows that by far the majority of the respondents (85%) continue with Eco-Schools as it serves as a tool to embed sustainability in the school⁵. Other often mentioned reasons are the distinctive value (58%) and creating awareness on sustainability issues among students (38%).

⁵ Respondents could give multiple answers (max. 3) on this question.

Figure 8. Reasons to continue with Eco-Schools (n=26)



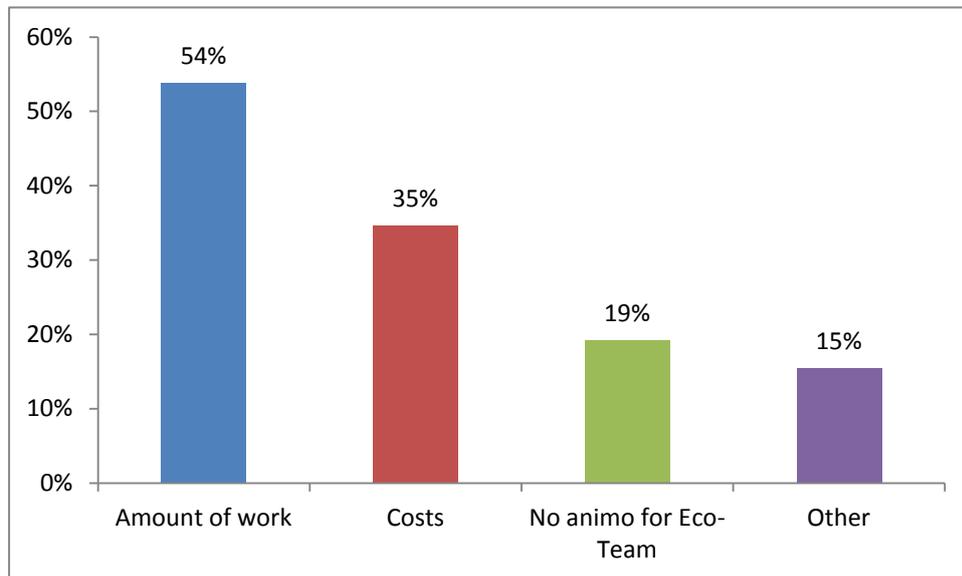
5.4.2 Considerations not to continue with Eco-Schools

Figure 9, tells that the amount of work is most often mentioned as a possible reason to discontinue the program⁶. One respondent said: "At the moment we have three green flags and would like to continue. But with Eco-Schools you need to fulfil more and more requirements to obtain the next flag. This is regarding the cooperation of colleagues a problem. We want to keep the program as it is for now, on this level. In this way we can cope."

Also costs are seen as an obstacle to continue. It is understood that fees have to be paid in order to support the programme. But schools also compare direct benefits and costs of remaining involved, especially since they are on a tighter budget. Until now the outcome is mostly still in favour of staying involved. Two quotes from interviewees are: "the only issue is the fee, (..) But we pay the fee and we understand why we need to support the bigger program: The Eco-School program" and "we will definitely continue with what we are doing know with the student council, green flag etc. But whether we will keep paying, I don't know..".

⁶ Respondents could give multiple answers (max. 3) on this question.

Figure 9. Considerations to discontinue with Eco-Schools (n=26)



5.5 Cross organisational character

The research and advice report can be of interest to both SME Advies and FEE-Nederland, as well as for e.g. the centres for environmental education (EE). The research will be distributed among schools that are involved in the Eco-Schools programme in the Netherlands due to the transparency. Moreover, the report will be shared with colleagues internationally (see chapter.. letter). The report could be of relevance to them as the Eco-Schools programme works internationally more or less the same.

In order to see whether the research could also be of use for other labels than the Eco-Schools the preliminary findings of Eco-Schools are compared and discussed in an interview with a person who's school is joining the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (UNESCO ASPnet).

UNESCO ASPnet was founded in 1953 and is a programme set up by the United Nations. At the moment more than 9900 schools have joined the programme spread among 180 countries (UNESCO, 2014). Currently there are 24 UNESCO Schools in the Netherlands. This is a relative a low number compared to the 86 schools that are involved in the Eco-Schools programme.

All schools in the UNESCO programme range from primary to HBO schools (UNESCO-scholen, n.d.). In the Eco-Schools programme schools can be involved from primary to intermediate. Moreover, international connection, tolerance and solidarity are important goals for schools with an UNESCO



profile (UNESCO-scholen, n.d.). For Eco-Schools the most important goal is to empower students to be the change agents our sustainable world needs by engaging them in fun, action-oriented learning (Eco-schools 3, n.d.). Further, from the in-depth interview it became clear that the UNESCO programme focuses on four themes: peace and human rights, intercultural learning, world citizenship, and sustainability. While Eco-Schools focuses on ten themes within sustainability: waste, communication, energy, building and environment, green, hygiene, mobility, security, nutrition and water (Eco-Schools 4, n.d.).

The preliminary findings of Eco-Schools and results of the UNESCO interview are compared according to the four different phases a school goes through when deciding to buy the Eco-Schools programme.

Phase 1 Orientation

For the Eco-Schools programme most respondents came in contact via the website/internet or via educational platforms. The respondent came into contact as a team leader from intermediate education requested that four/five years ago.

According to the interviewee it was easy to register at that time. But now it is more difficult as UNESCO really wants to have more commitment from a school. For Eco-schools it is not difficult either to register but the big difference is that the UNESCO programme is free according to the interviewee and the Eco-Schools programme is not. The costs obviously bring commitment for participants of the Eco-Schools programme.

Phase 2 Decision-making

The reasons to become a UNESCO school according to the respondent was the fact that a lot of activities that were already happening at the school could be linked to the programme, it fits with the profile of the school. It strengthens the international projects executed within the school. All these projects can be put under a certain umbrella: the flag of UNESCO. We find it important here that these themes such as world citizenship get a place in the school. And being an UNESCO school helps to embed these themes in the school. Another important theme that fits in the school is sustainability, that has really a strong connection with the school.

Definitely not a reason to join is the distinctive value. For Eco-schools one of the reasons to join was also that the programme serves as a tool to embed sustainability in the school. For UNESCO schools thus not only sustainability but also to embed the other themes. That it fits in the profile of the schools are also mentioned as a reason to join the Eco-schools programme but not in the top three reasons. Interesting is that a reason to join Eco-schools is the distinctive value whereas for the

interviewee this was definitely to the reason for him to become an UNESCO school.

Asking the interviewee if there is a chance his school would become an Eco-School. He responded that the costs are really a big obstacle. Eco-Schools should really emphasize what it is worth the €5000. Besides, obtaining a second flag is not that 'wow'. On the other hand the interviewee mentioned the school does already a lot on the area of sustainability, so the Eco-Schools programme could even fit the school better than the UNESCO programme. "I do not rule out that we will in the future become involved with Eco-Schools".

Phase 3 Active-involvement

With the Eco-Schools programme there is a seven step plan which a school has to pass in order to obtain a green flag. Schools can choose themselves which themes (3) they want to focus on and how they want to address these. According to the interviewee for an UNESCO school the school has to focus on three of the four themes. There is no plan they need to follow. Instead different projects as Dance for life are incorporated in the school. The Eco-School programme is thus far more concrete than the UNESCO school programme.

A big difference is that with the UNESCO programme the students are not actively involved. The staff thinks of actions and students could either be involved or not. For example a new building is build in a sustainable way, this addresses the theme sustainability but does not involve thoughts of students. On the other side projects going to Uganda working on a project, making jam involve students but it was conceived by teachers.

Just as Eco-Schools, the UNESCO programme offers guidance . One can call UNESCO whenever they have a question. Besides they arrange meetings, consultations with UNESCO schools to inform one another. Further, there are conferences, UNESCO days with all kind of workshops. One thing the interviewee pointed out he missed were concrete examples of activities that a school could do. Preferably that these activities are linked to current topics. Interesting is that from the preliminary findings on Eco-Schools it appeared that respondents also missed concrete examples that they could incorporate.

Students are enthusiastic for projects they participate in that are linked to UNESCO. For the Eco-Schools programme students were as well relatively positive. Interesting to note is that according to the interviewee not all teachers are aware that they are an UNESCO school or what it actually entails. "Colleagues are not naturally involved". They want to have concrete examples to see for themselves what it really entails. The same problem occurs at schools who join the Eco-Schools programme.



The high workload that was mentioned quite often in the findings on Eco-Schools was also pointed out by the interviewee for the UNESCO programme. The interviewee also mentioned that he liked it and didn't mind working some more hours. This is also came forward with Eco-Schools, in the sense that an intrinsic motivated person is key to successful join and be actively involved in the programme.

Phase 4 Continuation

Just as most respondents indicated for the Eco-Schools programme the interviewee opted that the school would continue with the UNESCO school programme. Quote from the interviewee: "Yes, I think so!".

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, for each phase the key findings of the research are presented. Limitations of the research are discussed as well and recommendations are made for further research. Suggestions for improvement of Eco-Schools services are dealt with in Chapter 7.

Phase 1 Orientation

In general schools who were orientating themselves on green school programmes were content with the information services of Eco-Schools: the quality was good. Moreover, first contacts with Eco-Schools were positively evaluated.

Schools were either approached directly or indirectly (via platforms/umbrella organizations) by Eco-Schools or the other way around, the schools in their search on how to embed sustainability in their school came across Eco-Schools, mostly via the website.

In many schools there was or were already (a) motivated person(s) who wanted to make their schools more green. This intrinsic motivation of key figure(s) seems to be the motor behind integrating sustainability issues and participating in Eco-Schools and could pose a constraint for Eco-Schools to expand to other schools where such(a) person(s) is (are) lacking. These motivated key figures are also as a matter of fact crucial for a successful implementation of all phases.

In this present phase but also in following phases, it is of prime importance for Eco-Schools to have a good website. The website must be easy to find, attractive and clear. As became apparent from the research, umbrella organisations are an effective way to reach new schools.

None of the respondents came in contact with Eco-Schools via social media. This could either imply that social media are not fully utilized by Eco-Schools or that schools do not find social media attractive channels to orientate themselves on Eco-Schools.

Phase 2 Decision-making

Making the decision to join Eco-Schools is essentially weighing the pros and cons. Factors which play a role too and can hardly be influenced are the personal affinity of the decision-makers with sustainability issues and the availability of motivated key persons.

Reasons to join Eco-Schools were embedding sustainability in the structure and curriculum of the school, increasing awareness of students of sustainability issues and distinguishing themselves from other schools. Considerations not to join Eco-Schools were costs, amount of work, and having other priorities. These reasons might as well be the reasons why other schools have taken the decision not to join Eco-Schools. In conclusion, Eco-Schools should promote the pro arguments to join and at the same time take seriously into account the cons as perceived by the schools. For instance reducing the perceived workload could lead to more admissions.

Phase 3 Active involvement

The quality of products and tools provide by Eco-Schools are considered as good. The exception was the social media channel. Guidance and support from the organisation was rated well, with the exception of personal attention. As this aspect was ranked as very important, Eco-Schools should pay priority to address this issue.

The Seven Step Model was in general perceived as neither easy nor difficult. The sustainability scan was rated of outstanding use. It is regrettable that the last step, the Eco-Code, is rated as the most difficult as after this step schools have to decide if they want to continue with Eco-Schools or not. Special attention should therefore be paid by Eco-Schools to clarify the Eco-Code. Foremost, it should be clear that the Eco-code is a mission statement.

Phase 4 Continuation

Most schools have the intention to or have already decided to continue with Eco-Schools. Primarily the decision is made by weighing the arguments in favour of and against joining Eco-Schools. The reasons of joining are actually the same reasons why schools did join the Eco-Schools programme in the first place: having a tool to embed sustainability in the curriculum and the structure of the school, distinguishing themselves from other schools and creating awareness among students of sustainability issues. The possible considerations not to stick with the programme are again the amount of extra work and costs. This implies that Eco-Schools should focus on reducing the amount of work for schools (for instance by providing ready-made materials) and consider reducing school fees (for instance by lobbying at national and European level for more subsidies or making the fee dependent on input by Eco-Schools).

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The present research is limited to schools who have already taken the decision to join. It would be interesting to find out why schools do not participate. It might be that they are not aware of the



existence of Eco-Schools which could be addressed by an information campaign.

Another suggestion for further research is to compare the approaches of the Eco-School concept across different countries.



7. ADVISORY REPORT

7.1 Introduction

Eco-Schools is an international quality mark for sustainable schools. The Eco-Schools quality mark was developed in 1994 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) as a result of the agreements of the United Nations (UN) conference 'Environment and Development'.

In 2003, the Eco-Schools programme was initiated in The Netherlands. SME Advies is responsible for the operations of the programme. Due to a slow take off, having 18 schools involved after 8 years, SME Advies choose, in October 2011, to reposition Eco-Schools (to fulfil the needs of the schools).

Even though there was substantial growth during the past two years and SME Advies/Eco-Schools The Netherlands carried out the above actions, it wants to know in what ways the Eco-Schools programme can be improved and grow further. Specifically, Eco-Schools had the following questions:

- How to support schools that joined Eco-Schools
- How to keep schools continuing with the Eco-Schools program after they have obtained the flag
- How to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools

To gain insight into and assess the customer satisfaction of the Eco-Schools program in order to formulate recommendations for improvement.

In general the schools were satisfied with the quality of the Eco-Schools programme. The research showed that there is gap between the needs of schools and actual perceived performance regarding personal attention and social media. As respondents indicated that they are the most in need of the personal attention, this should be addressed.

7.2 Recommendations per wish

The recommendations are based on the research results, the suggestions of respondents and interviewees, and on the opinion of the researcher in order to address the three wishes of SME Advies.



WISH 1: how to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools?

❖ Website of Eco-Schools Netherlands

- Make sure that potential participant can easily find the website. This can be done for instance by adding keywords and using search engine optimizer.
- Make it more clear what Eco-Schools is about by providing more information.
- Make a translation in English for international schools.
- More appealing video and photo material, for example a short video of the steps that a green flag school has taken.
- Present more images of students/staff of Surinam, Turkish, Moroccan etc. origin.
- Make clear the goal and mission (compared to the English website: Eco-Schools is an international award programme that guides schools on their sustainable journey, providing a framework to help embed these principles into the heart of school life.
- Make clear the benefits of joining and at the same time counter possible objections f.i. participation costs the school money, but it also saves directly by reducing energy and waterbills. Show it is worth the € 5,000 ;
- 'Voor wie is Eco-Schools' change to 'Welke scholen doen al mee' or provide content on why e.g. VO schools could participate;
- Tip: look at the English website for ideas.

❖ Finances

- Lobby for national or EU subsidies
- Consider a flex-fee: for schools that need only minimal input, the fee should be less than for schools in want of more support by Eco-Schools.

❖ Interschool co-operation and networking

- Involve participating schools to inform on and kindle enthusiasm for Eco-Schools in other schools;
- Keep in touch with umbrella organisations and school platforms;
- Be present at education markets.

❖ Intraschool



- Create a solid base; inform and enthuse staff.

❖ **Public Relations**

- Send flyers by post to school directions and make it personal by e.g. using their name;
- Make appealing posters and put them in for instance libraries;
- Publicity in education magazines such as J/M;
- Provide materials in English as well;
- Make a parent flyer;
- Improve current brochure by:
 - 3 most important reasons to join Eco-Schools
 - Other pictures (than only flag and white children);
- Emphasize on all PR activities:
 - Simplicity;
 - Fun aspects;
 - Flexibility, possibility to set own goals and create own programmes;
 - Real life education possibilities, science etc becomes truly alive. For instance at one school the solar car team from Delft University came with the solar car to the school;
 - Cost reduction of the school by reducing energy and water bills;
 - (Financial) profits of better environment and ecology,
 - A more interesting curriculum;
 - Proud, enthusiastic and motivated students and teachers as outcome of the programme;
 - Provide tips and concrete examples on how to achieve sustainability in practice
 - Student-led change, with incredible positive impact;
 - Creation of synergy.

❖ **National and Regional Media**

- Approach Jeugdjournaal, Klokhuis (infotainment).

WISH 2: how to support schools that joined Eco-Schools?

❖ **Website**

- Online helpdesk/ chat box (cheap way for personal attention)
- Expand with an interactive app/ game
- Exchange ideas between schools via for instance a forum



- Provide tips and concrete examples
- Usability test

- ❖ **Provide ready to use lesson material in order to reduce the workload of teachers;**
- ❖ **Provide certificates for students who are involved in Eco-Schools;**
- ❖ **Make more use of Social Media;**
 - Ask pupils who join Eco-Schools to change their cover photo of Facebook in a picture of Eco-Schools (secret advertising);
- ❖ **Make step 7, the Eco Code, easier by providing concrete examples and/or by readjustment of the requirements;**
- ❖ **Organize a congress or meetings to exchange ideas;**
- ❖ **Consider to dismiss or change the communication theme and consider the inclusion of the theme global activity;**
- ❖ **Improve methods for intermediate and secondary education institutions;**

WISH 3: how to keep schools interested in continuing Eco-Schools after obtaining the green flag?

- ❖ **Reduction costs via Flex fee**
- ❖ **Reduction of workload via ready-to-use material**

7.3 Prioritizing

The previous chapter consists of many suggestions for improvement. But, in order to give concrete advice to SME Advies it is best to prioritize. To do so, it is looked at the results of the respondents once again. It clearly comes forward that personal attention and social interaction are missing. Both are found in the active involvement phase. As it remains important to attract schools, it is also looked at the suggestions for improvement of the orientation phase. Results showed that most respondents went on the web to search for ways to implement sustainability in their schools. The ideas are visualised in the following chapter 7.4.

In order to address the personal attention a chat-box can be implemented on the website of Eco-Schools The Netherlands. Via a chat-box schools have the opportunity to easily get access to Eco-Schools The Netherlands and get personal feedback. For schools, compared to calling, it is less an obstacle to get in contact with Eco-Schools. It also differs from mailing as one gets response right away. This is at the same time a disadvantage. One should always be available. This could be solved by putting on the website specific dates and times when schools can chat to ask their questions. For example, every Wednesday between 15:00 and 16:00.

A great advantage is that a lot websites offer free software to implement chat-boxes on a website. For instance: <http://www.webhelpje.nl/index.php?d=12>. Also it does not take too much time to put it on the website on average 2 hours.

By implementing a chat-box the need of social interaction is met as well. But to go one step further, as schools also mentioned that they would love to exchange ideas, it is an idea to put a forum on the website. This, just as the chat box, does not take that much time and can be made for free (see: <http://www.freeforums.org/>).

In this way the most important needs of schools are addressed in a cheap and quick way.

In order for new clients to find the website more easily it is recommended to use Search Engine Optimization. For now it is not that easy to find the website of eco-schools unless you have heard of it. If for instance you type the word 'duurzaamheid' en 'scholen', one does not find the website of Eco-Schools on the first page. At bureau Bold for example one can get a private SEO course of 1,5 hour for just €165 (exclusive of BTW).

7.4 Towards implementation

STEP 1

CHAT-BOX

WHY? The chat-box is a solution to address the need of personal attention.

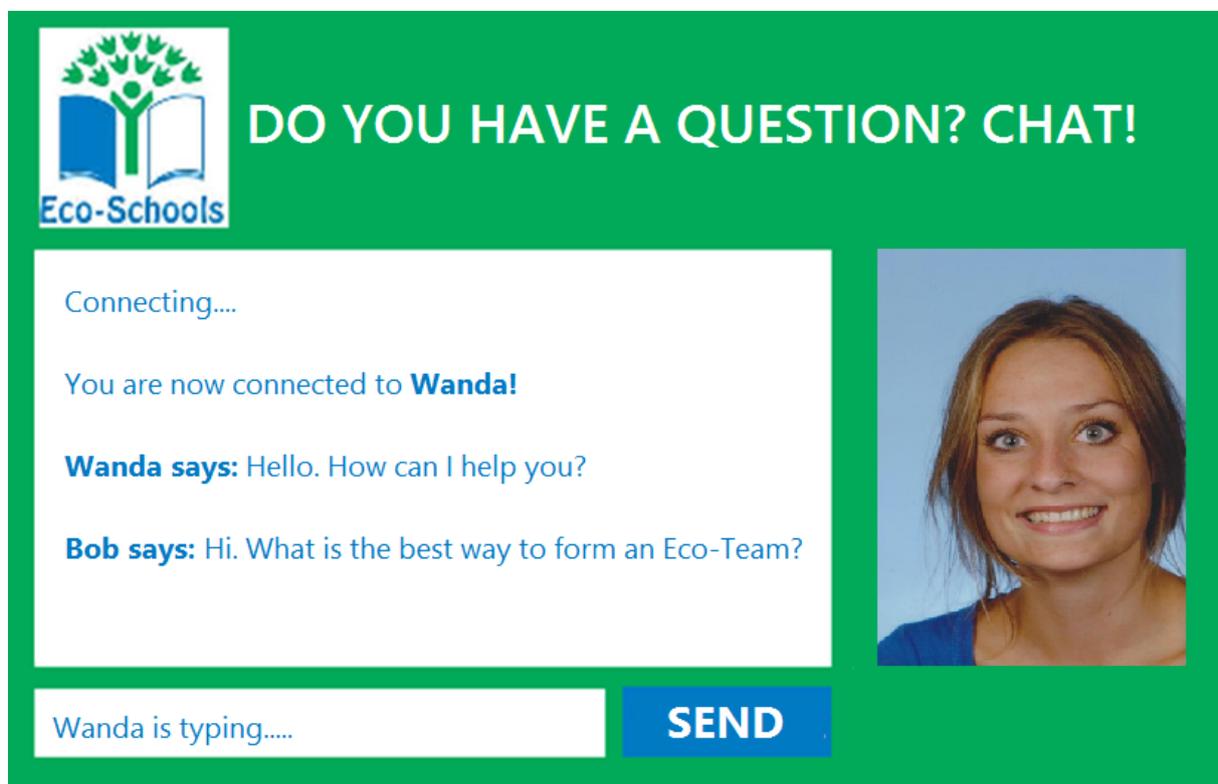
COSTS? Free

AMOUNT OF WORK? 2 hours

PHASE? Active Involvement

ADDRESSES QUESTION? How to support schools that joined Eco-Schools

EXAMPLE?



The screenshot shows a chat interface with a green header. On the left is the Eco-Schools logo. The main text reads "DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION? CHAT!". Below this is a white chat window with the following text: "Connecting...", "You are now connected to **Wanda!**", "**Wanda says:** Hello. How can I help you?", and "**Bob says:** Hi. What is the best way to form an Eco-Team?". To the right of the chat window is a portrait of a smiling woman with brown hair. At the bottom, there is a white input field containing "Wanda is typing...." and a blue "SEND" button.

STEP 2

FORUM

WHY? With a forum the social interaction aspect is addressed. As well as the wishes of schools to have the opportunity to exchange ideas.

COSTS? Free

AMOUNT OF WORK? 4 hours

PHASE? Active involvement

ADDRESSES QUESTION? How to support schools that joined Eco-Schools

EXAMPLE?

ECO-SCHOOLS FORUM

 Clusius College 15-4-2014, 11:39	Hi, We are in step 7: Eco-Code. Does anyone have an idea how to make the Eco-Code?
 Nordwin College 16-4-2014, 09:40	Hello, At our school the students thought of a slogan. That worked out well!
 Clusius College 16-4-2014, 15:21	Thank you!

STEP 3

SEO

WHY? Search Engine Optimization could enhance the amount of visitors for the Eco-Schools website. As for now it is difficult to find for people who do not know the existence of Eco-Schools. Type in google the key words 'duurzaamheid' and 'scholen' and eco-schools will not be found on the first page.

COSTS? €165

AMOUNT OF WORK? 1,5 hours

PHASE? Orientation

ADDRESSES QUESTION? How to attract schools to get involved with Eco-Schools

EXAMPLE?



The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "duurzaamheid scholen". Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Web", "Afbeeldingen", "Maps", "Video's", "Nieuws", "Meer", and "Zoekhulpmiddelen". The "Web" tab is selected. Below the tabs, it says "Ongeveer 38.300.000 resultaten (0,33 seconden)". The first search result is for "Eco-Schools Nederland - Home" with the URL "www.eco-schools.nl/". The description of the result is "Groene schoolpleinen en Eco-Schools gaan hand in hand. Het gaat hard met de groen schoolpleinen. Steeds meer scholen zien mogelijkheden om hun 'grijze' ...". Below the description are links for "Inloggen", "Contact", "Certificering", and "Keurmerk".

7.5 Words of recommendation



Mevrouw W. Verstappen
Mijehof 190
1106 HS Amsterdam

Utrecht, 21 May 2014

Subject: Recommendation on the Eco-Schools research and advisory report
Reference: C-20140513123252

Dear Miss Verstappen,

On behalf of SME Advies and the team running the Eco-Schools programme, we are very pleased to submit the Research and Advisory Report you wrote.

I have studied the report and feel that your investigation was very thorough. The recommendations in the advisory report on *how to improve the quality of the Eco-Schools program* concerning *how to attract and keep participants satisfied* (approach, decision-making, active involvement, continuation) are of great value.

Your recommendations and suggestions are of great value not only to the Eco-Schools programme in the Netherlands as well as our clients and colleagues (internationally). Your research gave us the insight that in general participants are satisfied with the quality of the Eco-Schools programme, but that there is room for improvement.

1. To attract new schools, we should improve the website, work on public relations and consider to reduce costs.
2. To support participants better, we should give them more personal support, which is also possible via a system in the website, for instance a chatbox.
3. If we want participants to continue, we should try to reduce the workload and lower the costs for the prolongation programme.



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www.sme.nl | www.sme-detaching.nl

Eco-Schools the Netherlands is committed to the broad dissemination of the research report and is willing to take the recommendations of the advisory report into account.

This report will be shared with our colleagues internationally and our participating schools. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martijn Nahumury".

Martijn Nahumury
Programme manager of Eco-Schools, the Netherlands



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