



Environmental Education: An Indispensable Tool for Public Awareness

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Abstract:

The environmental education becomes an indispensable tool of the strategy for ecological development, environmental improvement and protection as well as prevention of environmental degradation. Such an approach to education becomes a medium and process of creating public awareness about man's relationship with his natural as well as social and manmade environment. It should aim at enabling individuals and communities at par to understand the complex formation of environment that results from mutual interaction of their biological, physical, social, economic and cultural aspects along with knowledge, values, attitudes and skills acquired over the years. There is also a growing awareness of the need and importance of involving people actively in the protection and conservation of environment and management of the natural resources of their locality. The environmental conservation and restoration of ecological balance must include not just rivers, forests, and soil but also the humans. Both Women and Men can be good educator for their children and family shaping up the mind-set of the children and family members who is very much a part of the eco-system. Environmental education becomes an integral part of the strategy of eco development, environmental improvement and protection as well as prevention of environmental degradation. The environmental education, thus defined, becomes a medium and process of arousing awareness about man's relationship with his natural as well as social and man-made environment. Environmental education is the principal means of enhancing awareness, both among the public at large, and among focused groups. Such education may rely on educational institutions at different levels; the print electronic or live media; and various other formal and informal settings. Secondary sources of data like reports, journals, books and other related material are utilized for the preparation of this research paper.

Keywords: *Environmental Awareness, Environmental Education, Conservation, Management, Communities.*

1. Introduction

Things have changed dramatically since pre-modern times. In industrialized countries today, literacy rate is high i.e. almost every one possesses the ability to read and write at a basic level. The process of industrialization and the expansion of cities greatly influenced the development of the education system. Until the first few decades of the 19th Century, most of the populations had no schooling whatsoever. As educational system become universal, more and more people were exposed to abstract learning (of subjects like Maths, Science, History, Literature and so forth), rather than to the practical transmission of specific skills. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim sows the major function of education as the transmission of society's norms and values. Education is a product of the interaction of many factors or variables, stemming from within the individual and the environment. Defining the term "Environment" is as Difficult as quantifying it. For Environment educational research usually resort to empirical definitions of the "Climate" or "Atmosphere" of schools. Generally, Environment is defined as the aggregate of the various forces and stimulations which the individual receives from the

conceptions till death. Environment includes all the physical and cultural factors and conditions influencing the existence and development of organism (Daniel, 2007).

2. Context of the Study and the Statement:

It is very essential for each individual to develop an awareness of protection and preservation towards environment. In the present context the need of the hour is to create awareness about environment among students is must. Our environment is threatened due to many hazards. Air, water and soil pollution is on the increase. Degradation of environment results in many problems. Therefore there is a great need to protect and preserve our environment. The role of students would go a long way in achieving such desired goals. In order to hasten their awareness towards environment, it is necessary to know what levels of awareness they possess towards environment.

3. What is Environmental Education?

The concept of environment education emerged only in the seventies which were called as the decade of environmental education. During that period the world realized that environmental concerns and awareness could be spread only through a mass environment education program. The concept of environment education emerged from the Stockholm Conference organized by the United Nation in 1972. Recommendations of the conference emphasized organization of 'formal' and 'mass' environmental education programs (Stockholm Conference 1972). In response to this, UNESCO-UNEP launched the International Environmental Education Programme (IEEP) in 1975 whose objective was to promote exchange of information, experience, research, curricula and international cooperation in the area of environmental education. Educating the people at large about environment and its components would develop critical thinking analytical and problem solving skills in them. It would develop knowledge and insights to improve quality of human life on earth. Webster's (1975) New World Dictionary describes environment as an aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism. From the time of birth, the child's personality is developed and shaped through various agencies like home, school and society. The word 'environmental education' was first defined by Dr William Stapp of the University of Michigan in 1969. He wrote that, "Environmental education is aimed at producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve the problems, and motivated to work toward their solution" (NAAEE). His definition is important, for it includes the three elements that all environmental education (EE) programs strive towards. First, increase individuals' knowledge of the environmental and the problems facing it, and then educate them on the possible solutions to these problems. The third, and most important aspect of environmental education, is instilling in the individuals the desire to take action in working towards these environmental solutions. If people have knowledge of the issues, but are not motivated to work towards solving them, then the education has not been (Stapp, 1969). Environmental Education is a process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and added tools necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relationship among man, his culture and his biophysical surrounding. It creates an overall perspective, which acknowledges the fact that natural environment and man-made environment are interdependent. It should consider the environment in its totality and should be a continuous lifelong process beginning at the pre-school level and continuing through all stages. It should be interdisciplinary and examine major environmental issues from local, national and international points of view. It should utilise various educational approaches to teach and learn about and from the environment with stress on practical activities and first-hand experience. It is through this process of education that people can be sensitized about the environmental issues. Environmental education is education through, about and for environment. It is both style and subject matter of education. Style is concerned with an approach to education while subject matter or content is concerned with teaching about the components and constituents of environment. Environmental education is to improve all ecological relationship including relationship of humanity with nature. Environmental Education is a process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop

skills and added tools necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relationship among man, his culture and his bio-physical surrounding. It creates an overall perspective, which acknowledges the fact that natural environment and man-made environment are interdependent. It should consider the environment in its totality and should be a continuous lifelong process beginning at the pre-school level and continuing through all stages. It should be interdisciplinary and examine major environmental issues from local, national and international points of view. It should utilise various educational approaches to teach and learn about and from the environment with stress on practical activities and first-hand experience. It is through this process of education that people can be sensitized about the environmental issues; (Harris, 2006)

- Is concerned with building an environmental ethic.
- It enables to know him about the impacts of his activities on environment;
- It makes him know about different processes going on in the natural environment and their importance in keeping up the natural balance;
- It is through education that a person becomes able to have the knowledge about the status of different natural resources, needs and modes of their conservation etc.
- Education enables a person know about various processes of development and their impacts on environment;
- Education enables a person to understand the phenomenon of Globalization and its impact on environment, economy and the social equality.

4. Aims and Objectives of Environmental Education

The main aim of the environmental education is to make people in the society to be aware, knowledgeable and inculcate positive attitudes towards protection of environment and make them skilled to solve environmental problems so as to enable them to participate in the activities undertaken for the protection of environment. The teachers in educational institutes often conduct the various programmes towards sensitization of environment protection among all people in the society. Various social service camps and community service camps for environment preservation are arranged that are led by the teachers and students for the benefit of society. For example: Clean village, clean city, Dustless city, Awareness camps and Healthcare camps etc. Especially the students come from NSS and NCC to take responsibility for creating awareness and conservation of the environment among the public.

In India, there are many communities of people. They can contribute their participation towards the environmental protection and preservation programmes. Here the educated people can lead the awareness camps, preservation programmes. For examples, Rainwater savings, recycling the usage water, Mass environment programmes etc. On the other hand the wealthy community people form Rotary club, Lions club, Cosmopolitan club, etc. can conduct various awareness and conservation programmes frequently. They create interest among public to preserve and to conserve the environment. These awareness programmes are possible when the people have adequate education. Hence, teachers should contribute towards environment education in the society (Hassan, Juahir, and Jamaludin 2009). The environment awareness should be initiated from primary to higher education to the public. Defining "Environmental Education" is not an easy task unlike other curriculum areas, the specific content of environmental education has never well defined, it is universally agreed. However, that environmental education should be interdisciplinary, drawing from biological, sociological anthropological, economic, political and humanistic sources. It is also agreed that a conceptual approach to teaching environmental education is best. In 1969, President, Nixon formed the environmental quality council which advanced the idea of harmony between human beings and their environment as national policy (Kumar, 1986). The comprehensive definition of environmental education is formulated in the Tbilisi Conference held at Georgia in 1977 as Environment Education should; (Tbilisi Conference 1977)

- Consider the environment in totality.

- Be a continuous life long process beginning at the preschool level.
- Be interdisciplinary in its approach.
- Examine major environmental issue from the local national, regional and International point of view.
- Promote the value and necessity of co-operational energy level in the prevention and solution of environmental problems.
- Relate environmental sensitivity, knowledge and problem solving skills to every age but with special emphasis in early age.
- Help learners to discover the symptoms and real causes of environmental problems.
- Emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and thus need to develop critical thinking and problem solving skill.

Environmental education (EE) refers to organized efforts to teach about how natural environments function and, particularly, how human beings can manage their behaviour and ecosystems in order to live sustainably. The term is often used to imply education within the school system, from primary to post-secondary. However, it is sometimes used more broadly to include all efforts to educate the public and other audiences, including print materials, websites, media campaigns, etc. Related disciplines include outdoor education and experimental education. Environmental Education; according to the Annual Report (2004-2005) of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, the Government of India; can be defined as ‘a process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and added tools necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelationships among man, his culture and his biophysical surroundings.’ Through this definition, it is clear that environmental education can play a most significant role in building Awareness about- the relation between modern development and environment; and the impact of developmental practices on the surrounding environment among masses, if imparted properly. It is the educations which can enable a person know about everything (Annual Report (2004-2005) Ministry of Environment and Forest, the Government of India). Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978 cited in, Raina 1980) “Environmental Education as a way of learning subject. It is an approach through activities based on children’s social and physical environment, which leads to a progressive development of attitude and skills required for observation and recording etc.” Environmental education helps the learner to perceive and understand environmental principles and problems that enable them to identify and evaluate problems and assess their benefits and risk. Environmental education includes conservation of natural resources and everything that related man to his environment. Environmental education is a lifelong process. It should not merely at imparting knowledge and understanding of environment and its methods and their application for improving, but it should also aims at inculcating skills, attitudes and value Necessary to understand to appreciate and improve our biosphere (Nagarajan , Matheswaran, & Kalaichelvi 2009).

5. Objectives of Environmental Education

Acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total Environment and its allied problems.

- Knowledge– to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic Understanding of, the environment and its associated Problems.
- Attitudes– to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.
- Skills– to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.
- Participation– to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental. (Kartikeya, 2000)

Environmental education is an approach to learning makes the pupil aware about the problems, related to understanding the environment and hazards of its pollution. The environmental education is socially relevant as it help us to know that how unchecked and unplanned development pollutes air, water and soil and thereby threatening our existence. Therefore environmental education means the educational process dealing with man's relationship with his natural and manmade surrounding and includes the relations of population, pollution resources allocation and depletion conservation, transportation, technology, energy, urban and rural planning to the total biosphere(Patel, D.G. & Patel, NA. 1909). After the world summit in Johannesburg in autumn 2002, the United Nations designated the period 2005 to 2014 as the decade of "Education for Sustainable Development". To achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to change people's ecological, economic and social perceptions. The challenge that countries around the world therefore face is to integrate the concept of sustainable development in their education processes (World summit in Johannesburg 2002).

6. Public Environmental Awareness and Education

Environmental education is also a part of adult education because it is needed by all citizens at all ages to make their lives better, systematic and prosperous. Environmental education will help to improve the quality of life of the people and will conserve environment. Environmental education has long been defined to include three critical components: awareness, leading to understanding which in turn creates the potential and capacity for appropriate actions. More specifically, environmental education includes developing personal awareness of the environment and one's connections to it and developing an understanding of environmental concepts and knowledge of ecological, scientific, social, political and economic systems; the capacity to act responsibly upon what a person feels and knows, in order to implement the best solutions to environmental problems. Action can be taken in a variety of areas to increase environmental awareness and education. Some of these categories are: environmental legal rights and responsibilities and associated consequences, use of the media, awareness raising campaigns, incorporation of environmental issues in mainstream education, increasing awareness and education in target groups and encouragement of public participation in environmental matters. As the following case studies illustrate, many sectors of society are involved in developing and delivering educational courses and public awareness campaigns. These include Governmental institutions at the national, regional, and local levels; domestic and international NGOs; primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools; journalists and the media; celebrities; and other individuals and institutions. Moreover, educational and awareness efforts can target practically any sector of society. They can seek to raise public awareness broadly on environmental issues (e.g., through the media) the print, broadcast, and Internet media can be a powerful ally in educating the public on environmental matters (Prajapat, 1996). In order to perform this role effectively, it is often necessary for the Government to work with the media (and sometimes educate the media). This is often done informally, through regular briefings and information centres. Besides media, Traditional, religious, and local community leaders can play an influential or even decisive role in how people act. This is particularly true in rural areas. Education of these leaders can assist in facilitating the implementation of MEAs (multilateral environmental agreements). In working with such leaders, particular attention may need to be paid to issues of: or they may be a targeted campaign or educational effort focused on a specific sector (or target audience) on a specific issue. Funding for awareness and education initiatives may come from a variety of sources. Often, it comes from the budgets of specific agencies or Ministries; it is uncommon for such initiatives to receive funding directly from the central budget. As in any advertisement or public awareness campaign, the involvement of People that are well-known and respected public figures and effective use of the media can be a potent way of increasing understanding of the importance of environmental issues and enforcement. Newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and other media can be used to quickly reach a large number of people. Focusing Environmental Awareness Campaigns for Specific Sectors Awareness raising campaigns are often most successful when they are targeted at specific groups because information can be tailored to the activities, needs and Challenges of the group (Shinde, 2008).

7. Environmental Education, Sensitization & Conservation

Environmental Education is a powerful sensitization tool for the conservation of Environment, its biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources. The emphasis should be on sensitizing the student community through the teachers who can play a Fundamental role in transmitting the requisite knowledge and skills essential to restore or at least arrest the irreversible damage being caused to the environment. Environmental Education, sensitization and Training for environmental conservation plays a significant role in encouraging and enhancing people's participation in activities aimed at conservation, protection and management of the environment, essential for achieving sustainable development (National Policy of education, 1986). Environment is a global concept today and the first in the environmental education is environmental awareness. Environmental awareness is an approach to learning. The environmental damage already inflicted due to alarming on-going population explosion, rapid movement towards urbanization and industrialization, increasing needs of energy and fast scientific and technological advancement cannot be reversed unless there is collective thinking, will and effort. These call for public awareness and participation for bringing about an attitudinal change and finally restricting further damage to the environment. Effective implementation of environmental management and conservation programmes depends on education, awareness raising and training in the relevant areas. Without an understanding of how to conserve natural resources and the compelling need to do so, few people would be motivated to participate actively in programmes on environmental conservation, Environment education and awareness thus assume critical importance. Realizing of the extremely expanded environmental catastrophe, a preventive way should be carried out to slow it and thereby mitigating long-term environmental damage (Harris, 2006). Thus, one of the best ways of preservation is by creating environmental awareness among society especially students as they are future leaders, future custodians, planners, policy makers, and educators of the environment and its issues (Thapa, 1999). The onus of protecting the environment for the present and future generations also rests with human beings alone. The conservation of the environment is related to the individual efforts to save and protect the environment. The students acquire knowledge and skills from teachers to solve the environmental problems. Teachers also motivate the students for the environmental protection and develop programs for the benefit of the environment. It is important to organize and conduct the educational programs on environmental issues, problems, attitudes for the conservation and protection of the environment. Thus, environmental education should aim to improve the quality of the environment (Ghanta and Digumarti, 1998).

8. Environmental Education in Schools Systems

A vast section of population is found in different schools and colleges. Minds of these people remain ready to learn and curious to know about what is happening and what is likely to happen around their surroundings. These people can be motivated through proper formal education to take actions for environment. In view of these facts the MHRD had also been interacting with the University Grant Commission (UGC) to take appropriate steps for the inclusion of environmental education at the University Levels. After the directives issued by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, the MHRD as well as State Departments of HRD have included the environmental education as a separate and compulsory subject in the education curricula framed by NCERT, at all levels of formal education, that is at primary, Secondary, Senior Secondary and College levels (Indian Times: News item 2003. IST, TNN). The National Green Corps: The Ministry of Environment and Forest started National Green Corps (NGC) Programme in the year 2001 – 02. The objective of this National Programme is to generate Environmental Awareness amongst schoolchildren through establishment of Eco-clubs in all the districts of different states and Union Territories of India. The programme is being implemented by different nodal agencies. The principal focus of the NGC Programme is the introduction of action oriented studies of the problems of environment on different levels and finding out easy solutions of these problems through students under the guidance and supervision of their teachers (Shobeiri, 2007).

9. Conclusion

There is a strong need to protect our environment and to conserve our natural resources and make judicious use of them. Hence, the awareness towards the protection and conservation of environment should be developed within each human being, so that they can prevent themselves from exploiting the resources of nature and contribute towards sustainable development. We all contribute to environmental problems and, as a result, we can only solve them on the basis of cooperative action. Environmental education, like education for sustainable development, is based on building awareness and identification with personal living environments. It is time we realised that the environment is not just a factor in this game, but a game in itself; a game in which we are all players and on which our future existence depends. Environmental problems such as climate change jeopardise our prosperity and our economic development. Unfortunately, experience shows that in the environmental community there are many who do not understand the true meaning of sustainable development. Therefore, the environmental community must discharge its collective professional responsibility in ways that are consistent with the core requirements of sustainable development and environmental sustainability. We must think earth as a habitat, not of today but of distant tomorrow where there will be place and means for every being alive. The preservation and conservation of environmental heritage is our sacred duty. Thus, we need environmental literate citizens. Environmental education is a central aspect of the process of change towards sustainable development. For this environmental education is required, so that people become aware and take active part in protecting the earth's environment by making informed decisions and taking environmental friendly actions. It is essential that people are made aware through education and training by the teachers about protection and conservation of the environment. This will then inculcate in them sensitivity towards environmental issues and develop a responsible attitude towards the environment. However, for teachers to succeed in their endeavour for spreading environmental sensitization, it is important that the educational institutions should provide conditions conducive for it, so that teachers may contribute towards the delineation of the educational plans on environmental awareness issues and make efforts to incorporate indigenous knowledge into the formal education system.

10. From the Above Discussion the Following Suggestions Emerge

1. The problem of environment abuse is a serious one and needs to be addressed at the Local, national and international levels. To achieve a good quality of life on earth for all living beings, it is essential to spread awareness about and educate humankind for Sustainable development and environmental problems.
2. Teachers are potential change agents and are capable of generating a workforce of enlightened, skilled and motivated learners. They can empower the citizens with the ability attitude and values to protect the environment using formal and non-formal channels of education. It is essential that teachers themselves need to be trained and equipped with the requisite knowledge skills and values to effect such a change.
3. Universities and schools have to play an important role to translate the objectives and recommendations of the various commissions and committees into practice for achieving environmental literacy and awareness among learners (Kumar, 1986).
4. Research activities in the field of environmental education may be enhanced by providing attractive incentives.
5. Environmental Education should be introduced as a voluntary, extra-curricular activity to arouse the interest and awareness of students.
6. Technological interventions and mass media should be employed to create environmental awareness among the teaching community. A convergence of the conventional and open and distance learning systems should be employed to meet this challenge.
7. There is a need to train teachers in additional competencies regarding environment education (UNESCO-1985). The teacher training curricula should integrate environment education with the methodology component of all disciplines, since environment is a part of all areas of study.

Instead of burdening the existing teacher training curriculum with an extra subject on Environment Education, some weightage could be assigned in the practical component of the content-cum-methodology courses of all disciplines, for environment education.

8. Non formal channels of education like TV, Radio, and press and satellite technology can be effectively utilized for capacity building of environment educator.
9. Online courses on environment education with a thrust on the practical, skill and value development aspect could be developed for the teachers, educators, administrators, development workers or any person interested to become knowledgeable and aware of environmental issues.
10. User friendly, multi-media courseware on environment problems and awareness can be prepared, particularly for the rural-agro based communities in India.
11. Collaborative ventures could be created between the teachers and community through the agencies of schools, colleges, universities and other institutions. Such collaborations could include campaigns on environment awareness, tree plantations, and waste management or also in developing instructional materials.
12. Electronic and computer networks could be employed to connect globally and acquire information and expertise on latest developments in the area of environment education and training.
13. Hence, the above suggestions can play a major role in dissemination of knowledge, skills and values regarding environment, among teachers and through them to sensitize our present and future generations. Indeed environmental education as a hands-on extracurricular activity rather than an academic classroom subject is arousing growing enthusiasm across the country.

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