

Environmental Awareness through School Education

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ABSTRACT: *Environmental awareness has been one of the key issues in the field of education. It is the responsibility of the teachers to make their students sensitive to the environment they are living in. Protection of the environment is necessary for the future generations. Through education student must be made aware of the problems which our environment is facing today. It is in a sense on the verge of extinction. It is high time now that the stakeholders of education take serious steps to awaken environmental awareness among students and also among the community people. School education at present has shifted to continuous and comprehensive evaluation. Comprehensive assessment has the scope to assess the level of environmental awareness of the students, and it also can motivate the students to lead an environmental friendly lifestyle. Education for sustainable development considers environment as its one of the three constituents. At the global scenario there have been meets at regular intervals on environmental issues to get the nations to work for the safety of the sustaining earth. Environmental science has been incorporated in the school curriculum also to get the pupils acquainted with the environmental concerns. This paper discusses the scope of environmental awareness through school curriculum at the elementary and secondary level.*

Key Words: *Environment, Environmental Awareness, School Education*

Introduction:

The great educationist Mahatma Gandhi declaims, *"The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children..... to us"*. [Pisupati, B. *Environment, Biodiversity and Gandhiji*] This sense of responsibility should be developed among our students and we should also follow this in our lives. Protecting environment for future generations is to carry out the responsibility to them, and also to pay off the debt we owe them. The great philosopher Rabindranath Tagore also defines education as, *"The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence"*. [Tagore, R. *Personality*] Pupils must be given the scope to believe that to live the life in synchronization with all the existences on earth is the basic aim of education. In the post- modern world which is threatened by disintegrity and dubiousness, and by the commercialization of core values, the likes of great thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore may be evoked to in our everyday actions and thoughts. We must be aware of the reality that environment can satisfy our need, but not our greed. By carrying out damages to the environment we are only precipitating the ways of danger to our own existence. Responsibility towards our environment should be developed from the early age of the individual. Environmental ethics and values should be inculcated during the early stage of their development. Once their habit is grown, they will start interaction with environment in a sustainable way. Pupils' stay in the school years could be an effective measure in this regard. School curriculum should be redefined with a perspective of environmental education; school curriculum should be with a scope for the pupils to make them feel about the dangers our environment is put into, and also about the dangers our existence is enmeshed in.

Aims for Environmental Awareness

Aims for environmental awareness should be fixed first to set the school curriculum to implement along. There should be both theoretical areas as well as practical tasks for the pupils to fulfill these environmental aims. Teachers should implement the environmental education courses with a positive attitude to bring out the positives from their pupils. The United Nations Report 2018 on sustainable development posits: *"The year 2017 was one of the three warmest on record and was 1.1 Celsius above the pre-industrial period. An analysis by the World Meteorological Organization shows that the five-year average global temperature from 2013 to 2017 was also the highest on record."* [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018] In such grave moment the aims for environmental awareness could be listed as below:

1. To make the pupils sensitive to the environmental problems and crisis.

2. To teach the pupils to live in communion with nature and environment.
3. To engage them in community services like campaigning on environmental issues.
4. To engage the pupils in developing eco- friendly life-style.
5. To develop a positive attitude towards environment.
6. To ensure sustainability o the environment through the fragments of their activities.
7. To inculcate environmental ethics and values among the pupils.
8. To make them empathize with the environmental problems.
9. To motivate them to appreciate the beauty of the environment.
10. To enable the students to feel a communion with nature and environment.

The age when pupils undergo cognitive development, and at this stage it is easier for them to follow the instructions they receive through the curriculum they are going through. School curriculum should have the tasks that will develop among the pupils the above listed aims for environmental awareness to make the world a better place for living in.

Objectives

The objectives for this paper are:

1. To explore the school based activities for environmental awareness.
2. To discuss the role of information and communication technology in developing environmental awareness among pupils in the school.
3. To identify the suggestions in different policies and framework regarding environmental awareness.

Method

Qualitative approach has been followed for this paper. In depth discussion on different issues regarding environmental awareness has been carried out to present a holistic analysis of the present predicament of the environment.

Discussion:

1. The School Based Activities for Creating Environmental Awareness

Teachers should organize different activities in the school to create environmental awareness among the pupils. The activities should reflect pupils' concern about the danger our environment is undergoing. Pupils' participation in various activities will bring about a feeling of living togetherness that is very important for the protection of the environment. They must grow a sense of belongingness to the environment that will entrust them with responsibility to nurture the environment around. The activities should be organized in groups with some definite task to each of the groups. The school based activities could be as follows:

- **Tree Plantation**

Tree plantation programme could be observed every year by the school children with necessary guidance by the teachers. Tree plantation will not only confine in the school premises but could be stretched to the surrounding field also. It will try to engage the local people also in the programme; so that they can also realize the need to save and protect plant and trees around us.

- **Wall writing**

Slogans, statements and utterances in support of environmental awareness could be carried out in the form of wall writing on walls of the school building as well as on walls of the building in the locality also. Quotes from different educationists on the environment should find space on the walls; that may have an influential effect on people's mind.

- **Drama and Art Performance**

Drama and art performance on the theme of environmental awareness could be done by the pupils both in the school and in the community hall of the locality. It will open the minds of the people to the dire danger we are facing at the moment. It will open up the avenue for students to show their creativity; and also to be serious about the environment.

- **Parents' Participation**

Parents also could be invited to different programmes on environmental awareness in the school; and they should also be asked to join hands in the programme in their way. It will make

the community more engaged with the school activities aimed to spread environmental awareness among the community people.

- **Green Life Project**

The school could take up a green life project in the community with the help of the local people. It will emphasize maximum practice of environment friendly life style in our day to day life. This project will ensure a sense of alarm among the people to go by the ways and means to save the world around us.

Pupils may read a lot on environmental crisis and its fatal dangers, but they do not often reflect their concerns of it in their activities. So the teachers have to play the catalytic role in this regard that they take up some action in reality towards environmental protection. When pupils start taking responsibilities, they will disseminate it to the next generation. This flow of awareness will positively build a community sensitive to the environment, who will do everything to protect the planet for the next generations to come in future.

Continuous Assessment for Environmental Awareness

Assessment has been an integral part of curriculum. Every curriculum at the end of the course goes for the assessment of the progress of the learners. The conventional approach has been to assess the scholastic performance of the pupils. But the scholastic achievement alone does not measure the integrity of the individual. His diverse thoughts and imaginations can be measured by the continuous and comprehensive assessment techniques, as it measures not only the scholastic performance but the non-scholastic performance also.

The environmental awareness of the pupils does not directly come into the scholastic field of study. So the usual written test cannot reflect the level of environmental awareness of an individual. In order to assess the individual by its environmental concerns the tester must find help from continuous and comprehensive assessment techniques, as it provides the scope for the evaluation of the non - scholastic field also like awareness of the environment of an individual. The ways by which continuous and comprehensive assessment can be of help for assessing the level o environmental awareness is given below:

1. **Observation:** Observation of the student throughout year on his involvement in environmental programmes.
2. **Case- study:** Taking a case- study on individual student's change in level of environmental awareness.
3. **Portfolio:** Keeping a portfolio for the pupils' engagement in environmental issues till the end of the curriculum deliberation.
4. **Rating Scale:** Using the rating scale for every individual pupil on their reflection of environmental awareness.

Text Books for Environmental Awareness

The instructional materials have a definite role in transaction of every curriculum. Any curriculum meets its aims and objectives by the help of certain set of instructional materials that include textbooks and information and communication technology. Textbooks should cover the following issues in bringing about environmental awareness among pupils.

- History of the summits and conferences on environment at the national and global platform.
- Agendas of different summits and conferences for sustainable environment.
- Follow-up programmes on stage specific agendas.
- Action plan on run at the contemporary time.
- Records of environmental calamities and disaster.
- Measures taken to save the environment.
- Distinguished efforts made by the individual for environmental cause.
- Environmental dangers that looms large on us.
- Government policies at the national and state level for environmental protection.
- Role of different NGOs on environmental issues.
- Role of panchayats and municipalities in environmental safeguards.
- Performance of different educational institutions for the protection of life on earth.
- Social issues related with protection of ecology like rehabilitation and resettlement.
- Participation of all the authorities and departments that contribute in environmental programme.

2. The Role of Information and Communication Technology for creating Environmental Awareness among the Pupils in the school.

Information and Communication Technology has evolved into playing different roles in our everyday life. It has emerged with its new role in the field of educational technology also. Information and communication technology is stuffed with possibilities with the means to bring about environmental awareness of the school going pupils. The techniques are discussed below:

- **Visual display** of environmental hazards and disaster on the projector in smart classes will vividly present the problems to the pupils. The visual effect will have a lasting memory with them and they will easily come to know about the problem they read in textbooks.
- **Recorded experiences** of survivors of different environmental crisis will enliven the danger situation to the pupils. They will be able to empathize with the crisis moment which they have not faced personally.
- **Explanation** of the climate problems, ecological crisis and other environmental issues is live and easier with the help of information technology. Pupils easily understand the seriousness of the grave matters of environmental concerns.
- **Teleconferencing** with the pupils who are victims of the natural calamities could make the students ready minds for immediate action to protect the environment.
- **Documentation** of programmes on environmental awareness by different schools and organizations will help motivate the pupils to take up such activities on their own. Their activities also will be recorded and could be displayed in the annual functions of the school that could encourage them a lot.
- **Speeches** of dignitaries and distinguished authorities in the field of environment protection could be played to help the pupils build positive attitude towards ensuring sustainable environment.
- **Projection** of future situation of the global environment could sensitize the pupils about the extreme perils the human existence is put into. This will make them more than active in creating environmental awareness.
- **Creativity** of ideas for awakening environmental awareness through the use of information and communication technology can be utilized to the optimal level of efficacy.

3. Suggestions of Different Policies and Framework Regarding Environmental Awareness.

National policies and framework in India has identified environmental awareness as a core component of education system and in its national document the country has clarified its stands on this regard, which has been none other than protecting the environment and promoting environmental values. National Policy on Education 1983 declares, *“There is a paramount need to create the consciousness of the environment. It must permeate all ages and all sections of the society beginning with the child. Environmental consciousness should inform teaching in schools and colleges. This aspect will be integrated in the entire educational process”*. [Directorate of State Education, Research and Training: *Teaching-Learning of EVS at the Primary School Level*]

National document brought about by NCERT 2004 asserts that *“If education has to be an effective tool of change in the general attitude towards the treatment of the environment, teacher education will have to respond to this need effectively at all levels. The content and processes of teacher education will have to equip teachers with a proper understanding of and love for the nature around and the skill of inculcating these among their students. This may result not only in a healthier society, both physically and mentally, but also the much needed replenishment and sustenance of natural resources notwithstanding all the material and industrial development”*. [Directorate of State Education, Research and Training: *Teaching-Learning of EVS at the Primary School Level*]

National Curriculum Framework 2005 recognizes the significance of meaningful learning and the role of environment in this regard to proclaim that *“Learning takes place through interactions with the environment around, nature, things and people, both through actions and through language. The physical activity of moving, exploring and doing things, on one’s own, with one’s peers or in the company of adults, and using language- to read, to express or to ask, to listen and to interact- are the key processes through which learning occurs. The context in which learning takes place is thus of direct cognitive significance for meaningful learning”*. [Directorate of State Education, Research and Training: *Teaching-Learning of EVS at the Primary School Level*]

These policies and framework suggest that

- Environmental awareness should be one of the prime objectives of education at all levels
- Teacher education should be reframed to impart environmental education.
- Curriculum transaction should have an edge on environmental protection.
- Consciousness of the environment should start with the pupils at the elementary stages.
- The context for environmental awareness should be meaningfully created.
- Environmental awareness is important for the wise use of natural resources.
- All sections of the society should be made sensitive to the question of environmental awareness.

Strategies for Environmental Awareness

Strategies for developing environmental awareness among pupils should be clearly mentioned in the school curriculum, so that teachers find it easy to implement the programme in terms of execution and assessment. Strategies should be made more activity based that will keep the pupils more engaged in their work. The strategies should be made as per the following:

- ✓ Streaming documentary on environmental hazards and disasters. It will make the pupils feel deeply about the crisis. The visuals leave a vivid impact on the tender and young minds.
- ✓ Assigning projects on environmental issues, which can sharpen their comprehensive knowledge of the environment. Project works have the opportunity to provide hands on experience.
- ✓ Debate and discussion session on environmental crisis, which will come out with statistics and data regarding loss of environmental values.
- ✓ Visiting ecological parks can provide them with understanding of the chain that binds every life form with one another. They will come to know about the significance of all the existence upon earth.
- ✓ Touring to the places which have suffered environmental lapses. This can give them a practical knowledge of the impact of environmental loss on human life and property. The tragic scenes will make them wiser in life.
- ✓ Field work in the community on environmental programme. This will make them feel that protecting the environment is not a single hand task; rather it is a mass endeavour.
- ✓ Practicing eco-friendly way of life shows the pupils how their awareness of the environment can be put into action. Living a life in close proximity with Nature will give them bliss worth attaining.
- ✓ Survey of the locality on certain parameters of environmental concerns. This will deepen their knowledge of environmental problems on the basis of practical experiences.
- ✓ Put the criteria of environmental awareness in the parameter of comprehensive and continuous assessment that will encourage the pupils to grow more conscious about the environment and to be more active in protecting the planet.
- ✓ Developing platforms at the local and national level for endeavours on environmental threats. This will work as a holistic bond throughout the county to work for the greenery on the earth.

Conclusion:

Environmental awareness through school curriculum provides a good scope to orient the young minds towards sustainability of the environment as well as of the human existence on the planet. The school going pupils are in the developing stage of their attitude; so it is most suitable time for the teachers to groom the budding learners' attitude towards the vulnerability of our environment. Exposed to the knowledge of the dangers the environment is put in the pupils will spontaneously start campaigning in the locality to protect the environment.

Use of information and communication technology in awakening environmental awareness could prove to be highly effective for the school going pupils.. Pupils could be trained to use information and communication technology for their campaigning in the community also. Most importantly awareness is not the ultimate point to achieve, but it is an important point on the line to achieve the level of environment friendly practice in our everyday life. If people do not put their awareness into practice, no change will take place in the environment.

We must remember the widely spread adage that one must not cut a hole on the board of a ship in which he is sailing; if the ship sinks down, the man will also drown. Similarly our small injudicious steps towards environment put together will have a severe effect one day that might be pernicious enough to the

ultimate peril of the human existence on earth. Much time has already elapsed in wrong doings, it is time now to awake our consciousness and to work together to make the world a better living place for all.

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