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## CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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**ABSTRACT:** Not just India but it has become one of the major concerns of globe to address issues related to environment. We have enough knowledge about major environmental issues like various kinds of pollution, soil erosion, ozone layer depletion and many more and we are also aware of the fact that education has vital role to play in addressing these environmental issues along with other responsible stakeholders. But little do we know that education in itself has many challenges that hinder in awakening the citizens regarding taking care of the planet. We just believe in sensitizing our citizens regarding environment, its protection and maintenance through education but we hardly have made any effort in introducing and improving educational planning and provisions so as to address environmental issues. There is an immediate need of transformative Environmental Education and active environmental participation. World should understand that education is not only responsible for enabling the learners to solve mathematical problems or learn historical facts of India and the world but one of the major aims of education is to equip learners, teachers and other stakeholders to take care of our planet and make it a better place to breathe and live for all living and non living beings. There are many hindrances in the field of education which is obstructing in achieving this aim and needs immediate action. One important thing to understand here is unless we know what all are the problems we cannot find measures to solve them. Therefore this paper deals in finding out various challenges in the field of environmental education in India so as to come up with measures to sensitize generations on existing and probable environmental issues.

**Keywords:** Environmental Education, Protection, Planning, Provisions, Stakeholders, Challenges, Sensitize

### INTRODUCTION

We acquire our living from Mother Nature. But in the process of acquiring it, we have become so carefree about the maintenance of our home where we reside and mother who feeds us. Obsessed with development, globalization and modernization, we have become blind in witnessing and realizing degradation of our environment. Deterioration of environment has become so prominent that it has become necessary to give immediate attention in controlling and preserving it from further degradation. Before we address, we must figure out the problems behind this degradation amongst which industrialization, growth of population, pollution, poverty, hunger of luxury are the prominent ones including failure of education in generating environmental awareness in people. These problems are actually threatening the balance between humans and ecosystems. Hence, realizing these vital issues and need to address them, Environmental Education for sustainable development has emerged as an important approach to assist learners and all other stakeholders to protect, preserve and conserve the natural environment at all levels to the best of our ability. This initiative has been taken to not only save this environment but also to awaken and save our eco-unfriendly and eco-detrimental society.

Environmental Education has been introduced at undergraduate level by University Grant Commission as a compulsory subject for all the students of Arts, Science and Commerce and at school level by National Council of Educational research and Training and State Education Councils of almost all the states of India. Curriculum has also been designed at all levels to integrate environmental issues. But despite of these taken initiatives by the country and its education system there are many loopholes that are hindering in equipping the nation in treating environment with care, considering its sustainability. So, it becomes necessary for all of us to diagnose all the hindrances or obstacles that are actually restricting education in particular to address environmental issues.

## **Content**

At present, the content of the Indian Environmental Education is not much comprehensive and informative for the students. Curriculum framers must not only focus on theoretical aspects of environment to be taught to the learners but also should frame its content giving ample of opportunities to explore the environment by themselves so as to realize the underlying interconnection between humans and environment, various hazardous deeds of humans deteriorating it and the responsibilities we have in taking care of the same. Siddqui & Khan (2015) have suggested that the content must associate the learning with the actual world. It needs to be relevant to the learners and address problems that are significant to the society and should also master learners with the adequate skills in order to continue learning all through the life. Firsthand experience is very much important to be given to the learners wherever and whenever possible because unless they sense the problems by themselves they will not think of coming up and following the solutions for the betterment of environment and lives breathing in it. Therefore, content of environmental education should be practical in nature and encouraging in a way to gear up generations in taking earnest initiatives in improving the degraded status of our environment.

## **Allotment of Time**

Time that is allotted by teachers and students in sensitizing themselves on environmental issues is very insufficient enough to realize environmental problems and solutions. Environmental education is simply taken up as a subject that is either additional, a substitution or of less importance. It is not taken as a discipline that actually enables us to fulfill the objectives of the other disciplines because it is pointless to decorate messy or burnt home. One basic trend that has been examined in school is environmental education is either taught once in a week or twice. The time table of school or college that is been framed also reflects the lack of seriousness in environmental education as it is mostly kept after lunch or once or twice in a week as mentioned above.

## **Lack of Organization of Environmental Activities**

Since we have already talked above about insufficient allotment of time for environmental programs and awareness including burden of existing curriculum, it is obvious that educational institutions hardly spare their time in organizing environment friendly activities. We suddenly get to see plantation activity or cleanliness activities once in a year being performed by students either on World Environment Day or as NSS activity. Except on these days there is no opportunity given to learners to actually sense environmental issues and address them. Environmental awareness activities like mentioned above is limited to plantation of trees or community cleanliness activity only but in actual there are lot of things that can be done like field visits, slogan writing, awareness rallies debates on environmental issues and human deeds behind it, poster making competitions, slogan writing, symposiums related to environment and issues related to it.

## **Lower Academic Value**

It has been observed that Environmental Education as a subject or a discipline is considered to be of less academic value. Even as a career or profession environmentalist is considered to be the same i.e. of less value or not much of importance. We hardly get to see schools offering Environmental Education as a subject to be taught everyday like mathematics, English or Science. Also, hardly any colleges or universities offer Environmental Education as honors subject or a subject to choose as a career. This scenario of educational provisions in terms of subjects in itself proves that there is a lot of awareness needed to be brought not only in learners but also in the intellectuals and nation as whole to understand the importance of Environment and its education to be provided to the generations. Siddqui & Khan (2015) in their study also have highlighted this issue of less importance been given to the subject Environmental Education by the students as since they consider it to be of no academic value to them.

## **Burden of Curriculum**

Learners are overburdened with all other subjects, their home works and all other kinds of practical, projects and dissertations, that there is no time for them to indulge in learning about environment and its issues. Unless they learn about environmental issues there is no scope of enabling them to come up with environmental solutions and unless they are aware of environmental solutions, there is no hope from them of following corrective lifestyle avoiding environmental degradation. Therefore, there lies huge responsibility on curriculum framers to lessen the burden of other overrated or overemphasized subjects and give more attention this subject of environment.

According to The Central Board of Secondary Education there should be at least two periods a week for the subject and recording the performance of students in the form of grades. But especially it is realized that children who are appearing for their board consider Environmental Education and outdoor activities included in it as a burden and extra unnecessary load. It is actually the fact that existing curriculum is not just burden to the learners but also to teachers and parents leading to stress. Therefore, overemphasizing of some subjects and neglecting important subject like Environmental Education should be avoided and balance should be maintained in terms of emphasizing various disciplines in educational curriculum.

## **Lack of Environmental awareness and training in Teachers**

If we carefully look into the syllabus of B.Ed., D.El.Ed. and other teacher training programs we hardly get to see any environmental issues discussed or any kind of preparation or training been given to trainees so as to enable them to instill environmental sensitivity amongst their learners in future. The training programs can include important topics like biological diversity, pollution control, management of waste, and conservation of forest and wildlife. Besides, incorporation of some field learning tools will be of utmost importance, which will facilitate the teachers in learning and dispersing the knowledge to their learners about the dynamic components of the nature. Timely knowledge and experience on environmental issues should be given even to inservice teachers according to the need. It is very important to know that only environmentally awakened and promising teachers can only instill the sense of environmental responsibilities amongst their learners.

## **Negligence in Entry or Eligibility Criteria of Environmental Education Teacher**

If we carefully look into the eligibility of teachers teaching Environmental Education we will get to know individual having post graduate degree in Science are taken up to teach Environmental Education in Schools. We also know that to teach the subject, proper degree in Environmental Science needs to be there i.e. post graduate in Environmental Science with B.Ed. and STET to teach students from classes 6-10 and D.El.Ed. Despite of knowing the actual eligibility criteria to be recruited as Environmental Science teacher, our education system is recruiting the individuals simply having B.Sc degree to teach Environmental Education in schools who are if questioned will even not be able to define the term "Environment". Therefore, education system needs to pay extra attention in recruiting eligible teachers, assistant professors and other teaching professionals to provide education related to environment in an effective way possible.

## **Lack of Career Counseling**

Less do we know that there is a high scope of becoming environmental advisors for various renowned companies in respect of Environment Impact Assessment and one can also join international organizations like UNDP, UNEP, WWF, CEE, IUCN, BNHS, WTI etc. if we take up Environmental Education as our career profession. Not only this but other career option includes environmental activist, agricultural technologist, air quality inspector, animal services worker, etc. So, there is a need to highlight all these professional scope of taking up Environmental Science as a subject or career choice.

## **Lack of Organizational Support**

Education is not only the responsibility of Government, teachers and parents. Every stakeholders of the society needs to pay equal contribution in educating the society and has individual responsibilities to be fulfilled. Likewise, to educate generations in the field of environmental preservation, conservation, maintenance and sustainability there are lot of things that can be done by the society too. Various environmentalist or organizations working on environment issues can always spare their time in sharing their experiences and contribution in the field of environment. They can also fund educational institutions to organize environmental awareness workshops for teachers and students. Simple cleanliness activities can be conducted in schools and colleges in collaboration with community workers and volunteers. Similarly, National Council of Science, Technology and Communication, National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources, etc. can also organize various programs and campaigns on the environmental awareness issues in educational institutions and encourage not only learners and teachers but nation as a whole to work collaboratively for upgrading our environment.

Program like GLOBE i.e. Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment provides opportunity to the learners to participate in data collection and the scientific process, and contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the Earth systems and global environment. Environment is the home to not only teachers and students but to all, so it becomes joint responsibility of all to support educational institutions in training the learners in favor of environment and highly supporting them in all of their environmental ventures.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Since we all are very aware of the fact that there is no living without home and life without environment, it is very important to take immediate action to healthify our environment which is on verge of extreme degradation in order to make our living in this planet possible. This so called eco- unfriendly human deeds needs to be immediately controlled leading to various kinds of pollution, global warming, soil erosion etc. Education in this context surely plays a vital role in sensitizing humans to be careful with their eco-unfriendly deeds, but for that also several above mentioned challenges needs to be catered with the help of every individual and stakeholders of the society. Immediate steps needs to be taken especially in the field of Environmental Education by improvising educational content, allotting more of time to environmental concerns, emphasizing Environmental Education as a discipline and career and also by incorporating environmental awareness and training in teacher education curriculum. Further, organizational support is also needed to fulfill the aims of Environmental Education along with becoming demanding in terms of required eligibility for various teaching professionals dealing with environment and its education.

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