

Inclusion of Environmental Behaviour in Environmental Education

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Abstract:

The emerging environmental problems like Global Warming, Ozone Holes and Desertification are societal in nature and can be solved only by a collective action of the society. Environmental educators are of the opinion that environmental endeavours should focus not only on awareness, but also on attitudes and skill development towards solving the environmental problems. The teachers as well as students should be exposed to higher levels of knowledge and practical implications of environmental issues. Present paper focuses on the need of inclusion of environmental behavior in the syllabus of environmental education to maintain a quality environment. Human behavior has the potential to make drastic changes to the environment. Practicing beneficial behavior may save our planet from environmental crisis. If we collectively work to battle this giant threat to environment, we may be able to reverse the effects towards sustainable society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rich variety of genes, species and ecosystems, which has been the foundation for the social, economical and cultural diversity on this planet for past billion years, has now itself become an issue of serious concern. The industrial revolution that began from 1940 has permanently changed the ways human beings utilize natural resources and the ways they live on the Earth. The industrial revolution not only modernized the human society but has also caused an explosion in the population growth, which is projected to reach 9 billion over the next 50 years up from 7 billion today. The modern life requires much higher consumption of natural resources and energy by an average human being. There is an increasing realization that the human race now stands on severe threat of its sustenance in future due to a conflict between environment and development. The industrial nations have developed faster than the non-industrial nations and achieved high standards of living. The developed nations are utilizing natural resources as a progenitor of novel products and processes, whereas the developing nations are consuming natural resources as means of their livelihood. As a result, the affluent societies of developed nations consume more resources creating pollution and the poor societies of developing nations survive on resources causing depletion of biodiversity and ecological degradation of habitats. Sustainable use and conservation of natural resources can make substantial contributions in reduction of poverty, improvement in human health and well-being, and availability of natural resources for a longer time period. There is an increasing realization that the human race now stands on severe threat of its sustenance in future due to intimate conflict between environment and development. The UN World Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972, the Montreal Protocol in 1990, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in 2008, and periodical meetings of

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that environment is on the priority agenda of the international community.

II. CHALLENGES

The main hurdle in tackling the problem of environmental degradation is not only the lack of scientific knowledge but also the will to act. Under such a scenario, the society needs to be educated about the importance of environment and sustainable development for ensuring a healthy and homeostatic environment for our future generations. An eco-friendly psyche of people such as conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, recycling of wastes and use of alternate sources of energy may cause a paradigm shift in their behaviour towards their immediate environment. This in turn may harmonize environment with development. Ecological behaviour may appear to be susceptible to a wide range of influences beyond one's control (Hines et al., 1987). For example, our perception makes use of a material as resource or waste; cost of water affects water conservation; architecture of a home affects energy consumption; political measures promote or demote optimal usage of resources or/and minimal generation of wastes by the society.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

Psychology attempts to train human societies to be less exploitive in their use of natural resources (Kruse, 1995) and miser in generation of wastes. The degree of environmental awareness and attitude may determine an individual's ecological behaviour, i.e., human actions responsible for either environmental preservation or conservation or degradation (Axelrod and Lehman, 1993). A recent pioneering study has established environmental attitude as a

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powerful predictor of environmental behaviour (Kaiser et al., 1999). There may be three orthogonal dimensions of environmental behaviour: (1) environmental knowledge, (2) environmental values, and (3) ecological behavior intention. Environmental knowledge and environmental values shape ecological behavior intentions, which, in turn, may regulate general ecological behavior.

The challenge today is to make these local, regional, national as well as global environmental issues more meaningful to learners by focusing on individual contributions to the problems and then to develop decision-making strategies for problem solving. The learners also need to understand the beauty of nature, and operation and interdependence of its various components. A better exposure to local environmental problems through direct experiences may improve learners' environmental behaviour. Such a healthy environmental behaviour can motivate people to use alternate sources of energy, convert wastes into resources, and conserve biodiversity.

Kaiser et al. (1999) in their pioneering study established environmental attitude as a powerful predictor of ecological behavior. They confirmed environmental knowledge and environmental values explained 40% of the variance of ecological behaviour intentions, which, in turn, predicted 75% of the variance of general ecological behaviour. Many researchers have reported that level of education (Goetz et al., 1998), happiness (Frey and Stutzer, 2002) and population pressure (Brehin and Kempton, 1994) raised environmental concern and subsequently improved individuals' environmental behaviour (Duroy, 2005).

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

Environmental behaviour is a complex process that involves not only the knowledge, attitude and behaviour intention of individuals but also their firm commitment and moral norms about the preservation of environmental quality. Situational factors coupled with earlier experiences, sense of environmental stress and likely outcomes of the sustainable environmental actions (e.g. Restoration of degraded Habitats, Minimization and Recycling of Pollutants, Conservation of Biodiversity, etc.) are the strong motivators for a favourable environmental behaviour.

There is a need to evolve an effective strategy to make students realize that environmental conservation and management is as much their responsibility as it is of the government. The students should be encouraged to visit habitats like gardens, forests, ponds, etc. in order to get them better acquainted with the structure and function of nature to improve their understanding of environment. Opportunities should be provided to develop scientific temper in their perception about fragile ecological balance to improve their environmental behavior and they should be regularly monitored and mentored for improvement in their environmental behaviour, enabling them to refrain from any environmentally negative behaviour.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teachers should discuss the current environmental issues with the students for a better understanding of such environmental problems as global warming, ozone holes, synthetic chemicals, urbanization, etc. and expose them to existing environmental problems and their impact on them as well as on the society

The schools must motivate the students to participate in inter-school problem-solving activities. This may facilitate not only an improvement in students' knowledge and views but may also promote positive environmental behaviour. The schools must engage their students and teachers in a better understanding of the environmental values and its promotion through community activities

The syllabi should include details about the international cooperation, conventions and treaties being signed by various countries to tackle emerging environmental issues under the banner of United Nations Organization (UNO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), World Health Organization (WHO), etc.

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