



Environmental Studies: a practical plan for integrating environmental education as a student experience

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Abstract :

Environmental education is being taught at various levels worldwide. It provides an opportunity for the students in understanding the current context of the environment. Many variables complicate the existing problems of the environment threatening life on this planet. The Supreme Court of India has made Environmental Studies compulsory in higher education enabling students of all streams to study and gain knowledge about the problems the environment faces and help solve them. Not only India but various countries across the globe have realised the importance of environmental education at school/college level and are working towards making it a necessary component of their education system. This article summarises the necessity for a well structured syllabus for environmental education and tries to throw light on the various opportunities that are associated with it.

Keywords - Environmental education, Environmental issues, Opportunities, The Supreme court, Syllabus

Introduction

Environmental education is being introduced at school/college levels in many countries around the world to bring awareness about environmental concerns. Douglas and Holland defined Environment as a term used to describe, in the aggregate, all the external

forces, influences and conditions, which affect the life, nature, behavior and the growth, development and maturation of the organisms.

Environmental studies provide us an opportunity to understand the current environmental situation and enable us to think of solutions to the problems posed. As

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we speak of environmental problems, they have grown in size and complexity day by day, threatening the life forms on this planet. Urbanization, Industrialization, Agriculture, Transportation, Housing etc., have caused an explosive increase in pollution, deforestation, land degradation and so on.

At the wake of the 21st century, many countries realized the importance of protecting the earth from degrading further. Many international treaties were signed in order to conserve the natural resources and reduce the exploitation of resources.

Today we are totally looking at a different perspective of environmental education known as Environmental sustainability. With a growing population and increased demand for resources, it is important to think of sustainable methods that not only reduce the use of natural resources but also increase productivity.

Environmental education in higher education institutions

The Honorable Supreme Court has mandated the inclusion of environmental education in higher educational institutions in our country. This directive was to inculcate the environmental awareness among the students which would have opened up new opportunities in various industries and establishments. Unfortunately, this inclusion did not do any good to the institutions. It was never taken seriously by both students and the teaching fraternity. The concept of creating green campuses and sustainable practices have not been advocated in many institutions as well.

Environmental education in other countries

In Brazil, another country where environmental degradation is at its peak in the last century, has realized the importance of environmental education and many universities are implementing sustainable education to inculcate the responsibilities towards the environment.

In Asia-Pacific regions, Environmental education is embedded in all forms of education. Incorporating green initiatives in curricula is becoming a very common practice. Despite the economic hardships the countries in this region are doing their part in creating environmental awareness among all groups of students. Yet the Environmental education has not taken its role in main stream policies due to its direct relation to poverty, population, environmental degradation and discrimination.

It is evident from observations that there is no national policy on environmental education in many of the countries in this region and physical facilities to promote education are inadequate. There is an ambiguity in deciding the academic courses that can impact real life situations.

Environmental Ethics

World View - Person or group's belief about the meaning, purpose, operation and essence of the world.

Culture – We can influence our thinking through knowledge, beliefs and values. Each culture has its own tradition that helps them in understanding their immediate environment.

Accepting the fact that humans are part of nature will help us in understanding the value of Environment and its components.

Environmental ethics is the study of ethical questions regarding human interaction with the environment. A lot of things influence policy making and ethical standards in many countries, regions of the world. Population explosion is a better example to understand this. Most of the North American and European countries are able to make policies and implement them with fewer issues because of the population size and the geographical area they have. But in countries like India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Pakistan etc., it is really difficult to implement any policy based on their population.

India is a culturally diverse country where such policies can always attract negative remarks from the varied sections of the society. The governments should have a comprehensive policy making approach that can cater the needs of all its citizens without provoking their religious, linguistic and traditional sentiments.

Indian Universities are implementing Environmental education based on the directive from the Supreme court of India. In 1991, the honorable Supreme court of India made Environmental education mandatory at all levels of Indian education system.

The Government of India started implementing this through many education policies. University Grant Commission (UGC) Spent decades in conceptualizing and introducing the course on Environmental Studies. Unfortunately for various reasons environmental education was neglected to a

larger extent in the higher education institutes. In 2013, the Supreme court directed all Universities and higher education institutes to include Environmental education in their curricula. UGC looks after the implementation of Environmental studies as a subject at university level.

There are a lot of career opportunities associated with the study of Environmental studies alongside mainstream papers. One can work as Environmental Engineer, Green energy specialist, Conservation Biologist, Green lawyer and so on. With increasing awareness and stress on study of the environment and on its impact at various levels, there is a growing need for environmental educators and professionals.

Despite all these measures and awareness created through environmental education, the results are not so promising.

Reforms needed in Environmental education offered at Universities and Higher educational institutions

Indian education needs a leap in the implementation of new policies related to environmental education and sustainable development. The National education policy promises an overall developmental change in the field of education, but the same cannot be expected towards environmental education. Some changes that can bring about a new dimension to environmental education are as follows -

- Incorporating compulsory Project works to students in any related areas where they will be exposed to real time issues related to the environment. This can bring about new opportunities to

understand the problem and think of solutions.

- Increasing the credits scores of Environmental education paper.
- Incorporate project work and sustainable development into the curriculum.
- Make the subject compulsory in all the semesters.
- Make the field visit compulsory so that students will have the ground reality of the environmental issues.

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