

A Study On Importance Of Environmental Education Programs In School In India

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Abstract- In an effort to better equip the next generation to live in a sustainable world, Environmental Education (EE) is gaining popularity in India's formal school systems. This study takes a look at EE in Indian classrooms right now, highlighting its practices, problems, and possibilities. Part of a larger study that sought to design EE intervention programs for Indian elementary school students, this article provides an analysis of the author's evaluation of such programs. Interviews with specialists, resource persons, and heads of EE programs were part of the evaluation process, which also included reviewing NCERT textbooks and suggested teaching methods. According to the data, EE is mostly a theoretical field that teaches a utilitarian view of the natural world. These programs may provide new ways of doing things, but they do not always teach participants to change their ways of thinking and adopt more environmentally conscious ideals. Children may find it difficult to form deep connections with nature and to think morally about natural ecosystems because of this. In light of the deep insights offered by ancient Indian eco-philosophy in Indian Knowledge System, the author thus contends for a paradigm change in EE. Intervention programs centered on experiential activities can enhance the effectiveness and significance of EE for young children. The results should be considered by lawmakers, resource people, and teachers. The program's strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential avenues for improvement, could be better understood with the use of the insights gathered.

Keywords - Environmental Education, School, Indian, Evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

At this very moment, the devastation that is caused by the destruction of the environment is being felt all across the world. The ecological crisis that has thrown the ecosystem into disorder and threatens the existence of all living things is also characterized by the degradation of the environment, altering weather patterns, rising temperatures, and limited resources. All of these factors are components of the ecological crisis.

Despite our best efforts, addressing the ecological calamity that is currently occurring continues to be a difficult and complicated challenge (Elegbede et al., 2020; Dormido et al., 2023). As world leaders assemble in Bonn, Germany for the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27), the United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change, a tragedy that is occurring in India is nearing a critical point. If the international community does not take immediate action, it would appear that the rivers of the globe would be poisoned with poisonous chemicals, that floods will be lethal, that precipitation will be unpredictable, and that other disasters related to climate change will occur.

The current environmental catastrophe is not just the result of technology failures, according to new perspectives (Maloney et al., 1975). These perspectives argue that ecologically insensitive and maladaptive human conduct is the more fundamental source of the crisis. There is a lack of complete understanding among people regarding their ecological duty, which has had a negative impact on the relationship that the human race has with nature. This break in the connection that exists between people and the natural world is what finally resulted in the catastrophe that we are currently experiencing. Until the prevalent anthropocentric attitude is altered, we will never be able to recover from the ecological catastrophe that has occurred. Consequently, we need to make adjustments to the ideals that we currently uphold.

There is a widespread consensus that education is the most effective means of addressing the most pressing issue that we are currently confronted with. Environmental education (EE) is an approach that aims to harness the power of information in order to protect the local environment. The primary objective of this organization is to educate people about the environment and teach them how to maintain ecological systems and human behavior under control. It accomplishes this objective in a methodical manner. According to Wheaton, Kannan, and Ardoin (2018), the phrase "environmental education" refers to a wide variety of practices that are intended at instilling in the next generation a set of values, beliefs, views, and skills that are inextricably tied to the concept of environmental sustainability.

The authors Marstàngelo et al. (2019) state that environmental education helps to support the development of pro-environmental attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, dispositions, and capacities. This, in turn, contributes to the betterment of human-nature relations over the long term. Because of this, early education is of utmost significance for the development of green

movements and for the establishment of communities in which individuals are healthier and more involved.

It is impossible to change the perspective that an adult has of nature in a short period of time due to the inherent difficulties that are involved. The participation of children in this vital endeavor is recommended since they are less susceptible to being influenced by concepts that are anthropocentric and technocratic. When it comes to the formation of moral beliefs, the formative years of a person's life constitute the best time. Children's innate wonder, curiosity, and desire to learn about the world may be directed into teaching them key principles of sustainable living because this is the time when they are most open to learning about the world. Environmental education has the potential to play a role in the development of an eco-centric consciousness (Alam, 2022; Monroe et al., 2019). This is because environmental education can help students develop a thorough understanding of the connectivity that exists between humans and the natural environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout its history, the government of India has demonstrated a strong commitment to the protection of the environment. Environmental education courses are offered at all levels of education, including primary, secondary, and higher education, with the goal of assisting students in becoming more aware of environmental challenges and recognizing the necessity of actively engaging with the cause of nature protection.

In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated a program that was referred to as "Nai Taleem," which was India's first attempt to include environmental education into the country's educational system. With the intention of cultivating and nurturing reflective learners who were armed with appropriate knowledge and who were able to actively contribute in the improvement of society, the goal emerged. An important step forward in the direction of raising consciousness about environment and the importance of living a conscientious and sustainable life was taken by this event.

It is generally acknowledged that the Kothari Commission, which served from 1964 to 1966 and proposed the incorporation of EE into the curriculum of basic education, was the entity responsible for introducing it into the mainstream of the Indian educational system. The establishment of the Centre for Environmental Education in 1984 served as an additional incentive for the advancement of environmental education. As can be seen in the subsequent updates of the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005), the decisions handed down by the Supreme Court in 1991 and 2003 served as a catalyst for the development of government policies. Through the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework, the participation of the Supreme Court of India has unquestionably contributed to the advancement of the cause of environmental education (EE) here in India. This was an important step

in the process of incorporating EE into educational institutions, with a special emphasis on connecting theoretical concepts with actual-world scenarios.

The National Council of Research and Training (NCERT), which has its headquarters in New Delhi, is actively engaged in the mission of training the younger generation to become responsible stewards of the planet. In accordance with the verdict that was handed down by the Supreme Court of India in 2003, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was given the task of developing a uniform curriculum for environmental education (EE) that would be applicable across the entire country. The visualization was built on a shared foundation that contained a variety of components that were connected to the natural and social environment that the kids were being exposed to. Within the context of environmental conservation, there was a significant focus placed on the promotion of national identity and the cultivation of a scientific attitude. Both the extensive curriculum guidelines and the model syllabi that were published by NCERT for grades I to X made the concepts readily apparent. The approach strongly pushed for the utilization of innovative solutions that incorporate experiences gained from being outside.

In today's world, environmental education (EE) has become an indispensable part of the curriculum in schools all around the country. The primary objective of educational institutions is to instill in students the information, attitudes, and skills that will enable them to make meaningful contributions toward the accomplishment of the objectives of sustainable development.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has suggested that integrated textbooks be utilized for the purpose of teaching environmental studies in elementary school. On the other hand, Environmental Studies (EVS) has been divided into distinct categories of 'science' and 'society' in some contexts, which has resulted in the recommendation of separate textbooks and workbooks for each of these categories. In some contexts, environmental concepts are incorporated into the fields of mathematics and language science. Throughout the course of the curriculum, language and mathematics teaching are incorporated into the immediate environment of the child. Instruction on the "Art of Healthy and Productive Living" (AHPL) is included in classes I through II, in addition to a wide variety of themes that are associated with English Education (EE). In order to achieve the primary goal, which is to nurture knowledge and appreciation of various aspects of the environment, the primary objective is to recognize the environment as an essential source of resources and to emphasize the significance of conducting responsible environmental management.

It has been decided to assign separate textbooks for environmental studies to students in grades three through five. In the curriculum of both the social sciences and the scientific sciences, environmental concerns are given a great amount of attention. It is important to note that science and technology have been the key disciplines that

have been tasked with the responsibility of bringing environmental ideas into the curriculum of upper primary schools.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) included Environmental Education (EE) as a required subject for students in grades three through five in the year 2005. Using a textbook with the title "Environmental Studies," the curriculum incorporated Environmental Studies as a separate subject of study that could be pursued independently. The book "Looking Around" is a representation of the environment that is used in the third and fourth grade levels. It does this by concentrating on the learner's immediate surroundings. The course serves to familiarize students with both natural and man-made components of the environment, while also drawing attention to the impact that humans have had on the natural world. The objective of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to acquire knowledge about the various classifications of plants and animals, as well as the significance of these categories in maintaining human life.

The vast majority of these teachings place a focus on the significance of nature in regard to the basic role it plays in the existence of creatures like humans. The lessons also include an analysis of the life stories of people who live in rural areas and are committed to environmental stewardship. This is done in order to underline the significance of caring for the environment and to preserve it. As an additional point of interest, the appreciation of indigenous knowledge concerning the environment can be seen through activities that entail the identification of prominent trees and water bodies in the neighborhood.

In the books that are used for class V, there is a comparable emphasis placed on ecological concerns, and there is comprehensive coverage of these issues. In this section, students are taught to comprehend and acknowledge the connectivity that exists between humans, birds, and other creatures. It is via the use of references to trees, water, mountains, and other natural elements that they are made aware of the notions of growth, pollution, and deterioration.

Despite the fact that the existing framework takes into account substantial concerns regarding the process of becoming environmentally conscious in children through the use of activities and project-based studies, very little is really accomplished in practice. It is true that there have been efforts made to make English education (EE) more accessible in schools; nevertheless, these efforts have been extremely limited and infrequent (Sarabhai & K. B. (2009)). According to Pande (2001), teacher education programs are designed to train instructors to provide information in order to support the educational system that is currently in place.

In the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), there is a strong emphasis placed on achieving sustainable development goals that generate good effects on the environment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the spread of indigenous knowledge, which is an essential component

in the process of addressing environmental concerns. The New Energy Policy 2020 places an emphasis on sustainable development goals that have a positive influence on the environment. In addition, there is a stress placed on the dissemination of indigenous knowledge, which is an essential component in the process of finding solutions to environmental issues. A thorough approach is taken in India's National Education Policy 2020 to address widespread concerns pertaining to the learning environment. Plans are also included in this policy to ensure that the environment is in the best possible condition and that it is operating at its highest level of efficiency. It is disheartening to see, on the other hand, that the educational system in India does not acknowledge the urgent requirement to place an emphasis on environmental education (Kumari (2021)).

Despite the fact that educational institutions make every attempt to teach students about environmental stewardship and conservation, it is not known how much of the information that they teach is actually digested by the students. There is still a large amount of uncertainty regarding the extent to which awareness penetrates the consciousness of young children. After completing an exhaustive analysis and engaging in extensive focus group interactions with a wide range of students, it became apparent that a substantial number of their attitudes and behaviours can be defined as lacking empathy and demonstrating a worrisome contempt for nature. This was the conclusion that was reached after the entire process was carried out. Despite the fact that educational institutions place a large emphasis on environmental education (EE), the students showed relatively little enthusiasm in participating in conservation efforts for the environment.

The information that youngsters possess does not, to put it another way, present itself in the form of noticeable beneficial interactions with their natural surroundings. When it comes to issues concerning the environment and sustainability, the majority of students believe that a utilitarian perspective is the most appropriate one. Instead of focusing their attention on the environment itself, they are more concerned with the negative effects that will result from the destruction of the ecosystem and the depletion of the resources that the earth provides. Due to the fact that EE courses and content are mostly theoretical, it is probable that they foster a utilitarian conception of nature. This, in turn, makes it difficult to think about natural ecosystems from an ethical standpoint.

Additionally, pedagogical strategies used in ecological education have been shown to have deficiencies, as pointed out by specialists in higher education. The majority of educators restrict ecological education to practices that are on the surface level and enlighten students about concerns that are emerging in the field of ecology and environmental preservation. As a consequence of this, there is a lack of an operational engagement with the natural domain. Less than half of instructors actually implement environmental education (EE) in their classes, despite the fact that all teachers

receive training on the subject (Iyengar & Kwauk, 2021). Additionally, environmental engineering is mostly focused on action-based changes that only treat the symptoms of environmental degradation. This is because environmental engineering does not have a comprehensive grasp of sustainability and environmental degradation.

3. GAPS IN CURRENT EE PROGRAMS

Unquestionably, the inadequacies of environmental education in India have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the simple act of disseminating information about environmental concerns is not enough. Empirical data provides additional support for the assertion that merely addressing knowledge is insufficient to bring about changes in behavior (Bradley et al. (1999); Manoli, Johnson et al., 2007). Several studies that have been carried out over the course of the last three decades (Orr, 2004) have indicated that the awareness of environmental issues has a minimal impact on ecological behavior. It has been discovered that consciousness is a secondary element that is vital, and that emotions are the sole mediators of the significant impact that awareness actually has. According to Carmi et al. (2015), environmental information that elicits environmental emotions is the only way to significantly influence environmental behavior.

According to Hinds and P. (2008), the emotional connection that people have with the natural world plays a significant part in determining the extent to which they are inclined to engage with natural areas. There has been no success in assisting young students in internalizing the concept of "nature." Nature is considered to be something that is "out there" in the current EE discourse. According to Roszak et al. (1995), when an individual's concept of self encompasses nature, any damage to nature is perceived as inflicting injury on the individual. This feeling of belonging has the ability to serve as a precursor for the development of an emotional connection with the natural world, which in turn contributes to the preservation of that natural environment. The cultivation of a new level of awareness among students, which is associated with the concepts of deep ecology (Miller, 1996) and focuses on understanding the interconnectedness of all life forms and the complexity of the global ecosystem, is necessary for the development of positive environmentalism.

However, the successful incorporation of environmental education in our nation is confronted with considerable challenges as a consequence of the substantial impact that scientific viewpoints from the Euro-American region have had on our understanding of the environment.

In order to make progress, it is abundantly evident that we must first recognize and then address the difficulties that are brought about by these constraints. It would be a significant difficulty to accomplish this task within the constraints that are imposed by the framework that is now in place. Because of this, it is essential for us to make the shift toward a new paradigm.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The existing educational framework, which was built during the time of colonial rule, was founded upon the scientific knowledge system that developed and advanced inside Western industrialized civilizations. Consequently, the influence of Western values, including the primacy of reason, individualism, and hyper-consumerism, alongside various cultural perspectives that alienate people from their environment (Bowers, 2006), has manifested in the Indian educational landscape and has permeated the collective mindset as well.

It is absolutely necessary to investigate the Indian philosophical heritage in order to accomplish the goal of determining the values that are necessary for increasing the relationship between humans and nature. This tradition places a stress on the unity that exists between the ego and spiritual reality, as well as the concept of a "relational self" (Misra et al., 2004). This concept presents interesting avenues for rethinking the dynamics of the interaction that exists between humans and the natural world.

It is possible for psychologists to construct effective therapies for the purpose of boosting environmentally significant behavior by making use of the profound insights that are contained in ancient Indian eco-philosophy. By introducing intervention programs that are aimed at the following, early education (EE) can be made more successful and relevant for young children.

The provision of opportunity for close and profound interactions with nature in order to foster a strong connection to nature

Developing educational activities that involve hands-on experience in order to foster feelings of empathy and compassion toward natural elements

Incorporating the understandings that are obtained from eco-spiritual frameworks that are operating within the cultural environment.

The incorporation of content that is distinctive to a particular location and is pertinent to the existing value system in society

5. CONCLUSION

It is of the utmost importance to recognize that India has adopted a number of measures, one of which is the mandated incorporation of environmental education into all levels of schooling. The transformation in thinking and attitudes that is necessary to develop into responsible earth citizens is not necessarily addressed by these programs, despite the fact that they may offer novel projects, ideas, and practices. The attitudes of pupils do not alter in response to environmental challenges because they are unable to recognize environmental problems as being personal issues. As a result, the curriculum for environmental education needs to be revised in order to better meet the ecological challenges that are currently being faced, as well as to make it more engaging and

adaptive. In order for children to genuinely embody environmentalism, they need to expand their understanding beyond only being aware of environmental issues and concepts. Creating strong ties with the natural world and providing them with the opportunity to accept environmental protection as a way of life are the only approaches to guarantee success in achieving this objective..

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