



DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Dr. M. Jyosthana

Associate Professor, R.V.R.R. College of Education, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

Introduction

The environment plays a vital role in the health of all species and the existence of life on Earth. The planet Earth is home to several living species, and we all depend on the environment for water, air, food, and other resources. Therefore, it becomes essential for every person to protect and save the environment. Environmental Education is a process of promoting awareness among individuals, make them understand the environment in its real perspective and recognize its relationship with man and his activities. Environmental Education is the study of the environment and its dynamics, its various forms, environmental degradation, factors influencing the degradation of environment and its impact on human life. It is the need of the hour to prepare suitable strategies of environmental education to protect our environment. The goal of Environmental Education is to improve all ecological relationship including the relationship of humanity with nature and people with their surroundings. Thus, it may include conservation of energy and soil, protection of air, water and atmosphere from pollution, effective utilization of locally available resources, creation of conducive atmosphere for living through social and civic consciousness and harnessing natural resources without any ecological imbalances. Environmental Education is a learning process that seeks to increase people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges; develop the necessary skills and expertise to address these challenges; and promote attitudes, motivation and commitment to make informal decisions and take responsible actions. (UNESCO, 1978). Environmental Education gained importance at the global level with the first global declaration, the *Stockholm Declaration* on Environmental Education, made by UNESCO in 1972. This was the first time that the recorded documents formally suggested that education relating to environment should be included in school curriculum. Soon after the conference, UNESCO launched the International

Environmental Education Programme (IEEP)

In 1975, UNESCO, with representatives from 60 countries, released the *Belgrade Charter* in former Yugoslavia. According to this Charter, the goal of Environmental Education is to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated problems, so that the population will have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation to work individually and collectively towards the solution of current problems and prevention of new problems that arise in future (UNESCO, 1976). Following Belgrade charter, the first world's first Intergovernmental conference on Environmental Education was held in Tbilisi, Georgia. This conference adopted the *Tbilisi Declaration* in 1977, which challenged Environmental Education to create awareness and values among individuals in order to improve the quality of life and environment. The *Tbilisi Declaration* set up recommendations for the broader application of Environmental Education in formal and non-formal education; and this major occurrence and the subsequent publications continue to provide a fundamental framework for the development of Environmental Education around the world (Neal and Palmer, 1990). This declaration also recognized that, in addition to proposing the development of critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills in the context of environmental issues and improving the quality of life, 'students should actively be involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems' (UNESCO, 1978). A major outcome of this declaration had resulted in the formulation of objectives of Environmental Education.

Objectives of Environmental Education

- (i) **Awareness:** To help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity towards the total environment and its allied problems
- (ii) **Knowledge:** To help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experiences and acquire a basic understanding of the environment and its associated problems
- (iii) **Attitudes:** To help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for their active participation in environmental improvement and protection
- (iv) **Skills:** To help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems

Brundtland Report

The next development focusing on the objectives of Environmental Education came with the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development – WCED, 1987). This report shifted the focus of Environmental Education towards sustainable development, economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. The Brundtland Report paved path for the publication of *Agenda 21* at the Earth Summit in 1992 (Tilbury, 1995). The summit, which was otherwise known as the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio-de-Janeiro, called for the re-orientation of Environmental Education towards sustainability. It underlined the need for a holistic perspective to be reflected in the curricular approach to Environmental Education For Sustainability (EEFS). It highlighted the essential need to integrate the concept of ‘sustainability’ into all learning areas. Any Government, at its own level, can’t achieve the goal of environment conservation, until the public have a participatory role in it. Public participatory role is possible only when the public were made aware of the ecological and environmental issues. In short, if we want to manage on the earth, we would have to make the entire population environmentally educated. Environmental awareness aims at improving the quality of environment, creating awareness among people on environmental problems and conservation, and creating such an atmosphere as people find themselves fit enough to participate in decision making process of environmental development programmes. Environmental education is concerned with subjects in the way in which natural environment works, how human beings should behave to manage the ecosystem to sustain the environment. It provides the necessary skills and expertise to handle the associated challenges. The main focus of environmental education is to impart knowledge, create awareness, inculcate an attitude of concern and provide necessary skills to handle the environment and environmental challenges. The Government of India had taken up many environment friendly activities during the past several years. The Ministry of Environment and Forests was established in 1986 and laws on environment protection had been implemented.

National Environmental Awareness Campaign (NEAC) was conducted during 2000-2001 for creating environmental awareness at all levels in the society with the main theme, ‘*Keep our environment clean and green*’. The Ministry interacted actively with several Apex Bodies at the national level such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) for introducing and expanding environmental concept, themes, issues

etc., in the curriculum of schools and colleges. Systematized, organized and awakened social mind can be developed only through right type of education and it is through this kind of education, it is possible to create appropriate awareness among the individuals to make their lives and the environment creative, constructive and progressive. To bring such a state of mind among people, it is essential to foster scientific attitude towards environment right from their school education.

Environmental Education in School curriculum

In ancient India, there was Gurukula system of education. Students used to spend a number of years in Guru's Ashram. Guru was their father figure. He remained a guardian, an advisor, a counselor, a philosopher and a guide for all his disciples. Guru's wife remained a mother figure for them in the Ashram. She used to treat them as if they were her own children. Education was completely free for them. There was no discrimination among students by virtue of the wealth or status of their parents. The students used develop right attitudes and values under the complete supervision of their Gurus. They acquired education in all the domains of learning – cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Besides, they lived in a natural environment and cared for conserving it. They had a lot of respect for the environment in which they lived. Environmental Education was an integral part of their educational and cultural system; and students understood the need for conserving wildlife, ecosystems and abiotic environment. There had been a lot of change in the system of education during the middle ages. The thrust on environment and all-round development of students was shifted to classroom instruction and learning of 3 R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). The very spirit of learning, wherein observation, exploration, comprehension and application were inherent, had been sacrificed. Cramming of facts and rote memorization became the order of the day. The knowledge acquired by the students without using their senses (touching, smelling, tasting etc.) in the natural surroundings could not be assimilated and internalized. It went off their memory soon after the completion of the examination and award of the certificate. Obviously, environmental education – educational excursions, eco-treks and natural walks had no place in such a system.

Environmental Education in formal system of education has been reported as initially coming into school curriculum in the early 1970s through Science education (Gough, 2002). The origin of Environmental Education can also be traced further back to the promotion of nature studies and later to the conservation movement (Stevenson, 2007). Here, it aimed at developing knowledge, awareness and skills about environmental issues and natural resources;

and was broadly incorporated into the curriculum of primary schools and Science and Geography curriculum in secondary schools. Stevenson (2007) also argues that although the aims of nature studies and conservation education can moderately be accommodated in the goals of school system, improving environmental behavior among students is a far more challenging mission for schools. In the 1980's, the role of Environmental Education in school organization was meaningfully developed by increasing public environmental concern, giving a stronger impetus to schools to implement Environmental Education (Tilbury, 1995). Chapter 26 of *Agenda 21* emphasized that 'Environmental Education should be incorporated at primary and secondary schools and that it should be the responsibility of educational authorities to promote all kinds of programmes for continuing education in environment in the move towards sustainable development' (UNESCO, 1992). A serious thought about EE in schools started after the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) circulated its Discussion Document (2000) inviting comments from concerned agencies. It was revealed that the document was miserably lacking environmental concern at school curricula. Towards the end of the last century four major reviews of EE in the country were published by Centre for Environment Education (CEE 1998), C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC 1999), Prativesh (1999) and Gill and Lahiry (1999). The National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education — A Framework formulated in 1988 (NCERT; 1988) marked the first concerted and systematic effort to bring EE into the school curriculum. This took an "infusion" of environmental concerns and a whole range of environmental concerns were infused into the NCERT model test books published between 1987 and 1989 (NCERT 1987-89).

Recent Developments

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio De Janeiro in 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg in 2002 have drawn the attention of the global community to discuss problems concerning environment and development. In order to achieve the goals of sustainable development, people need to become aware of the environmental issues and acquire background knowledge to enable them to make and influence decisions. Environmental education is thus concerned with attitude towards, and decisions about environment quality, with informed management of resources, and with the ethical considerations that relates to these. Recognizing the importance of environmental education at all levels, the Hon'ble Supreme Court ruled that a course on Environment be made mandatory at the undergraduate level to sensitise the youth to

environmental issues and concerns. As per the Supreme Court direction, the University Grants Commission introduced six months compulsory environmental course in all the Universities and Colleges during the academic year 2004-05. The declaration of the decade for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) beginning in 2005, by the United Nations has provided further impetus. The goal is to create a *sustainable world* through active participation of citizens. Thus, ESD is seen as a process that develops vision, builds capacity, and empowers to make changes in human societies. Education has a pivotal role to play in achieving a sustainable economy and society. The dilemma that an educator faces today is that, by and large academic institutions try to teach everyone to accept the economic system and to succeed within it. Unfortunately, that success pretty much guarantees the accelerated blighting of the planet and all living organisms, without exception. The cognitive and cultural separation of "ecology and environment" from the human enterprise, has led to a large scale degradation and depletion of natural resources. The guiding ideology needed to learn and teach sustainability is an ideological orientation that emphasises conserving cultural values, beliefs, and practices that contribute to sustainable relationship with the environment. All the citizens must be environmentally literate. Perhaps the best way to visualise is by incorporating environmental education in the structure, pedagogy and curriculum of academic institutions.

References

- UNESCO (1972) : *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNICE). Stockholm: UNESCO.*
- UNESCO (1976) : *The Belgrade Charter, Connect I (1), 1-9.*
- UNESCO (1978) : *The Tbilisi Declaration, Connect III (1), 33-40.*
- UNESCO (1992) : *Agenda 21. Reo declaration on environment and development. Retrieved from:*
<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21chapter36.htm>
- UNEP (2013) : *Rio + 20: From outcome to implementation-Our Planet. Retrieved from*
<http://www.unep.org/climatechange/publications/tabid/249/Default.aspx>
- UNEP (2014) : *UNEP Year Book - 2014: Emerging issues in our global environment. Nairobi, Kenya: UNEP Division of Early Warning*
- United Nations (2002) : *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. New York (NY): United Nations. Retrieved from:*
http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/documents/summit_docs/131302_wssd_report_reissued.pdf