

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020 AND ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

One of the most glaring problems which the world faces today is environmental pollution. Man has exploited nature excessively at the cost of the environment. There is an immediate need to make people aware of environmental degradation. UNESCO claims “Environmental education is a method of putting the objectives of environmental conservation into practise”. It is a lifelong multidisciplinary subject of study, not a distinct branch of science. It refers to education for environmental preservation and improvement, as well as education as a tool for growth to raise human societies' standards of living. India has started several initiatives, one of which is making environmental education mandatory at all educational levels. There is a need to reorient the environmental education curriculum to make it more appealing and responsive to the local environmental issues in today's world where environmental conditions are changing negatively, and all living things are suffering because of environmental pollution and climate change. The environment must prepare Students with the necessary Life Skills besides academic skills. India's National Education Policy 2020 takes great care to address the common issues related to the learning Environment and proposes measures to keep it in top shape & form. The new Education System takes over a kid when she or he is just three years old, and that certainly puts enormous responsibility on the System. This paper will cover important points of NEP 2020 regarding Environment Education and its evaluation and challenges in the near future.

Keywords: environment education, challenges, opportunities, curriculum, and National Education Policy 2020.

Introduction

The first colour image of the Earth was captured in 1972 by Apollo 17.¹ Our planet was shown as a blue marble set against a pitch-black void. We all agreed that Earth is a closed, finite system and is the only place we must call home. Our blue marble, also known as One Earth,

¹Blue Marble - Image of the Earth from Apollo 17, <https://www.nasa.gov/content/blue-marble-image-of-the-earth-from-apollo-17> (last visited Nov. 1, 2022)

needed to be taken care of "as a complete and complicated mechanism supporting an extraordinary complex network of interacting and interrelated life," according to this statement.

Environmental catastrophes have occurred during the preceding decades have raised public concern and knowledge about the environment. It was obvious that a coordinated reaction was required throughout the Cold War and the numerous nations that were battling colonialism. Some nations advocated for the United Nation to take on more environmental initiatives.

The United Nations Charter, the founding document of the UN, aims to enhance everyone's quality of life by fostering peace, stability, economic growth, and human rights. On environmental concerns, though, it was mute. The basis for worldwide collaboration on environmental issues was ultimately created by "the initiative of a little country in Scandinavia."

There has always been disagreement and conflict surrounding environmental concerns. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which in turn influenced environmental management for the following 50 years, was formed by these discussions. Because of the debates inspired by the conference, important concepts like sustainable development and organisations like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) exist today.² The Stockholm Conference showed that collaboration on environmental and sustainable development challenges is feasible when leaders take the initiative and pay attention to everyone's concerns.³

Governments gathered in Stockholm, Sweden, fifty years ago, and formally recognised the relationship between the environment and development, putting it at the forefront of the global agenda. The work initiated by the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 has led to the formation of important concepts and organisations, including "sustainable development" and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It was made clear that intergovernmental collaboration is conceivable during the Stockholm Conference.

The Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan addressed several concerns related to the environment and sustainable development. The Stockholm Conference was essential in identifying these issues, bringing attention to the difficulties that needed to be solved, and putting the world on the path to a more ecologically sustainable way of life. Governments negotiated treaties, enacted plans of action and programmes, gathered environmental data,

² Engel, R. and Engel, J. (1990) *Ethics of Environment and Development*, Belhaven Press

³ Dewey, J. (1934) *Art As Experience*, New York, Minton, Balch

founded scientific organisations, hosted international conferences, and built environment ministries along the way.⁴

The Stockholm Declaration, 1972 comprises the proclamation of 26 principles and several other submissions of recommendations. Every principle which is laid down in the Stockholm declaration is an important provision of the declaration. However, Principle relating to Environment Protection Education is envisaged under Principle number 12.

Principle 12: Environment Protection Education

Humans need to be educated about environmental protection to make them much aware about the issue. It is essential and it should be communicated to humans by conducting skits or through media or any other medium to make people aware of the environmental crisis so that people would work effectively to control the pollution by putting their efforts.

Thus, Education relating to Environment protection is itself the major principle under Stockholm declaration 1972.⁵ Environmental education focuses on the facets of human behaviour that are more closely connected to how a person interacts with and comprehends their biophysical environment. Through the process of environmental education, people may learn about environmental problems, solve them, and take steps to protect the environment.⁶ People have a greater grasp of environmental concerns as a result, and they are more equipped to make wise choices.

A complete, ever-evolving education that is responsive to changes in a world that is changing quickly is environmental education. Understanding the key issues of the modern, complex world—problems brought on by the interaction of the biological, physical, social, economic, and cultural components of the person and the community—helps to prepare the individual and the community for life. Environmental education restores a broader perspective that recognises the fundamental interdependence between the natural and built environments, as well as the connection between current actions and future effects.

Need of Environmental Education

⁴ SEEC (Scottish Environmental Education Council) (1987) Curriculum Guidelines for Environmental Education, Paisley, SSEC

⁵ Stodolsky, S.S. (ed.) (1988) The Subject Matters, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

⁶ *ibid.*

Environmental damage has been proven by Global Environment Outlook's several reports. The environment is under more and more stress because of population expansion, economic activity, and consumption habits. It implies that many forms of pollution have continued to be caused by the quick increase in demand for energy, transportation, and other forms of consumption.⁷

Unsustainable land use has resulted in soil erosion, nutrient depletion, water shortages, salinity, and disturbance of biological cycles, which are all examples of land degradation. Degradation affects other ecosystems, productivity, biodiversity, and climate change. Water scarcity is worsening, which threatens environmental services, food security, public health, and development.⁸ The consequences of population expansion, rural-urban movement, growing income, resource exploitation, and climate change pose a danger to the quantity and quality of water and land resources as well as environmental support services. Future development is still gravely threatened by the loss of ecosystem services and the reduction in biodiversity on a global scale.⁹ Therefore, environmental deterioration impedes progress, endangers future development, and is unmistakably connected to issues with human health.

India is currently dealing with comparable issues. According to the most recent official assessment by the Centre for Science and Environment¹⁰ (CSE) on the condition of India's environment, Such as: -

- The report also dissected 2011 census data on migrant populations and found that more than 50 lakh people were evacuated within India last year, which is the highest number in the world.
- Flooding brought on by the south-west monsoon caused 26 lakh displacements, while Cyclone Fani alone caused 18 lakh displacements, followed by Cyclones Vayu and Bulbul.
- At the time of the tragedies, there were more than 45 crore migrants in the nation, the most of them were moving inside their own State.

⁷ Cooper, G. and Sterling, S. (1992) *In Touch: Environmental Education for Europe*, Godalming, World Wide Fund for Nature

⁸ Bennett, S.N. (1976) *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress*, Wells Open Books

⁹ CEE (Council for Environmental Education) (1987) *Introducing Environmental Education. Book 2, Schools: Educating for Life*, Reading, CEE

¹⁰ CSE criticises environment ministry's new notification on emission norms for coal-based power plants, <https://www.cseindia.org/cse-criticises-environment-ministry-s-new-notification-on-emission-norms-for-coal-based-power-plants-11409> (last visited Oct. 25, 2022).

- In 2011, more than 1.7 new migrants, mostly from rural to urban regions, moved for work objectives.
- Forest covering has reduced by 38% in the areas, and five of the 21 river springs are currently experiencing total water shortages.
- 1,357 people died last year because of 19 significant weather disasters.
- The Corona shutdown experiences have ensured that industrial activity and vehicle emissions are the primary contributors to urban air pollution. With a mean annual rainfall of roughly 1200mm, this resource is becoming scarce due to a lack of effective water management techniques.

These are but a few justifications for why we might anticipate improved environmental education. It is crucial to comprehend how we are connected to nature. We depend on our surroundings. To promote a sustainable environment, it is essential to comprehend our relationship with nature and the fact that we are just one species among many on a globe teeming with life.¹¹

Our activities have brought about positive effects, including life expectancy, material wealth, travel, and leisure. But there are other more unfavourable developments. have emerged from land degradation, air and water pollution, and extinction that endangers human well-being. It poses a risk to human health. Most significantly, we must comprehend our relationship to the because understanding the environment is a crucial first step in resolving our most urgent environmental issue that eventually affects the social, economic, or health systems.

Historical perspectives in Environmental Education

The concept of environmental education in India is not unusual nor recent. It has been around since prehistoric times. With a clear warning on the consequences of environmental deterioration and the necessity for conservation for human life, every religion and every culture in India emphasised environmental concerns while representing the traditions and societal viewpoints. Nature is viewed as an all-encompassing force in Indian culture.¹²

The ancient Hindu texts, including the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads as well as the legendary Mahabharata and Ramayana, have firmly established the justification for environmental

¹¹ Sharma, R.C. and Merle C. Tan (1990). Source Book in Environmental Education for Secondary School Teachers, UNESCO, Bangkok.

¹² Sharma, P.D. (1999). Ecology and Environment. Rastogi Publications, Meerut.

conservation as well as religious rituals and prohibitions against the excessive exploitation of natural resources. For instance, there are several references to Man-Earth interactions in the Atharva Veda's *Prithvisukta*. However, this tradition is still present in indigenous communities across the nation.

Since 1930, the Indian educational system has included elements of environmental education in its curricula. The Report of the Education Commission (Kothari Commission-1964–1966)¹³ laid the foundation for the current state of informal environmental education. In the initial phase, the Report suggested that *"the primary school science curriculum should focus on helping students gain a thorough grasp of the key facts, ideas, principles, and processes in the physical and biological environment."*¹⁴

There was enough information about the environment in the scientific and social science curricula and teaching materials, as well as to some extent in the language and mathematics curricula, to achieve the required goals. At the senior secondary level, the biology, chemistry, physics, geography, sociology, and mathematics textbooks all included enough information on the environment to advance the knowledge, comprehension, and abilities learned up to that point in the secondary stage.

The 42nd amendment to the Indian Constitution, passed by the government in response to the UN conference in 1972, encouraged environmental awareness by requiring the state to "take measures to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country" (Article 48 -A). By inserting the phrase "thereof requires, every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forest, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures".¹⁵ "Fundamental Duties" in Article 51 A clause (g), it further made every person accountable. Given this context, the Indian government formed the Department of Environment in 1980, later redesignating it as the Ministry for Environment and Forests in 1985.

The government introduced its national education policy (NEP) in 1986, and one of its main focuses was the importance of giving education at all levels an environmental emphasis.

"There is a crucial need to foster an awareness of the environment," the policy declared. It must start with children and spread to every aspect of society. Schools and universities should be

¹³ National Council Of Educational Research And Training, Report Of The Education Commission, 1964-66 (1970), <http://www.academics-india.com/Kothari%20Commission%20Report.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Singh, Y.K. (2007). Teaching of Environmental Science, APH Publishing House, New Delhi.

environmentally responsible. This element will be included throughout the entire instructional procedure. The National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), which oversaw carrying out the strategy, recognised the need of placing teachers at the core of any reforms in education. The government launched a significant teacher-training programme in the summer of 1986. A revised orientation was given to thousands of instructors.

At the primary school level, Environmental Education (EE) is presented as Environmental Studies (EVS). The physical, biological, and social aspects of our environment are studied in EVS for grades III through V, with a focus on preserving and conserving it (NCF 2005). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005 states that environmental education is very much integrated into a variety of courses, including physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, political science, health and physical education, art, and music.

The following are some of the goals of teaching EVS, according to the NCF 2005.

- To teach children how to see and understand connections between the natural, social, and cultural setting.
- To create an understanding based on observation and examples taken from real-world experiences. rather than abstract ideas, consider life's physical, biological, social, and cultural components.
- To develop cognitive ability and resourcefulness in order to make the youngster interested in social issues occurrences, beginning with the immediate family and expanding to larger places;
 - to encourage a child's inventiveness and sense of wonder, especially about the natural world (including people and objects); to increase knowledge about environmental concerns.
 - Involve the kid in hands-on, exploratory activities to help them learn fundamental cognitive and psychomotor abilities through observation, categorization, inference, etc.
 - To place an emphasis on design and fabrication, estimation, and measurement as a foundation for the later development of technological and quantitative skills.

- To be able to critically address gender issues and issues of marginalisation and oppression with values of equality and justice, as well as respect for human dignity and rights.

New Education Policy 2020: Opportunities and Challenges

A path for reclaiming, re-articulating, and reconstructing the Bhartiya self is provided by NEP-2020 so that we may become a world leader (Vishwaguru) where equity, equality, and brotherhood would be honoured¹⁶. The current environmental education system is not improved by it. With the way environmental education is now set up, it is happy.

It does give the proper weight to sustainable development goals, which are also concerned with environmental benefits, The strategy also places a strong emphasis on the dissemination of indigenous knowledge, which is excellent for addressing environmental issues.

However, the failure of the Indian educational system to realise the need for greater environmental education is quite regrettable. Environmental concerns are not a priority for the school system in India. Due to this mentality, India is falling behind in environmental research. Therefore, it was essential that we discuss the environmental education curriculum and pedagogy reforms that are much required.¹⁷

We shall encounter the beginning stages of a trend that gravely risks damaging the very fabric of our existence within our generation if the current rate of environmental devastation is allowed to continue. The current degree of environmental damage is unprecedented in the history of humanity. The environmental issue is mostly caused by overconsumption, which is why environmental education must emphasise consumption restraint. In the end, modifying our consumption habits will help protect biodiversity and our own environmental welfare.¹⁸

These challenges to environmental education force us to reconsider how we do research, educate and train environmental specialists and educators, formulate legislation, and disseminate environmental knowledge to the public.

From now on, Environment Education (EE) will be included as a subject in the form of only a few chapters of the textbook. It limits the scope of discussion of Environmental Issues because it is integrated into Core Issues. Centralized textbooks do not address specific regional

¹⁶ Sathyabhushan, Govinda R. And Anjana Mangalagiri, Environmental Education Hand book for Educational Planners. (1990) NIEPA, New Delhi.

¹⁷ Joseph Catherine (2011) Environmental Education, Neelkamal Publications PVT LTD, Hyderabad.

¹⁸ Prashanth, M.S. and Hosetti, B.B. (2010). Elements of Environmental Science. Prateeksha Publications, Jaipur.

contextual issues.¹⁹ The limited availability of EE in teacher training may be the reason for the limited nature and motivation of teachers for teaching methods.

It is difficult for instructors to include EE into their lessons due to a lack of reference resources on the environmental issues and difficulties unique to each state and poor school infrastructure. Here are some suggestions for overcoming the problems mentioned:

- The school libraries might receive genuine reference resources from different governmental and non-profit organisations. This would help the instructor contextualise the state's environmental issues.
- Giving schools access to information and communications technology (ICT) would provide them quick access to digital materials and contribute to raising awareness of environmental concerns in the nation and throughout the world.
- It is important to urge teachers of core disciplines to pay attention to EE themes that are interwoven with the material of other subjects.
- To assist the instructor in the classroom, it would be necessary to organise modules, seminars, and frequent discussion forums.
- There should be regular textbook revisions to allow for the integration of modern environmental issues.
- In the context of instruction, case studies, field trips, and Nature hikes and project work should be promoted to foster an inquiry- and exploration-based mentality.
- It is possible to build appropriate practises that are child-directed and inquiry-based, based on research, theory, and real-world experiences.
- By encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making in realistic situations, compelling stories and case study evidence would help the comprehension of EE techniques.
- The development of environmental awareness, skills for understanding the environment, curiosity, and inquiry, as well as a personal feeling of duty and care, might all be included in the curricular framework for environmental learning.

¹⁹ Jayant Gangrediwar (2014), Environmental Science, SBW Publishers, Delhi

Conclusion

To make environmental education more pertinent, we must concentrate on global change. The fact that students do not see environmental challenges as personal matters contributes to the lack of change in their attitudes. This shortcoming may be fixed by giving pupils greater justifications for protecting the environment. It's great that so many natural science classes engage students' hearts and brains and promote optimistic thinking. However, research has consistently demonstrated that doing so on your own may not always provide the desired outcomes. To consider any change, one must identify his involvement in the issue at hand. Teachers can encourage this by designing green classrooms that provide pupils a place to organise themselves personally in their surroundings and immerse themselves in the problems that matter to them.