



## ENHANCING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AWARENESS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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### *Abstract*

*This study aims to enhance environmental education awareness among primary school teachers. It will provide valuable insights and resources to empower teachers in educating the next generation about environmental sustainability. Environmental education plays a crucial role in shaping the sustainable mind-set of young learners. It fosters a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment, ensuring a better future for all. Primary school teachers often encounter challenges in integrating environmental education into the curriculum. Limited resources, time constraints, and lack of training hinder their efforts to instill environmental awareness. Educators can implement environmental awareness in schools by hosting events, integrating environmental themes into the curriculum, etc. Educating students about the environment is crucial for saving the planet from the hands of disaster and making it a better place for future generations to live.*

**Keywords:** *Environmental Education and Environmental Awareness*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers play a predominant role in imparting knowledge and sensitizing the students and society about the environment. They help to tackle the various environmental issues. Environmental problems have increased tremendously because environment is being abused beyond its capacity by human beings. Issues related to environmental problems have become a major concern for the international community particularly for educational policy makers and curriculum developers. Environmental Education is a powerful sensitization tool for the

conservation of Environment, its biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources. Teachers are the potential change agents and are capable of generating a workforce of enlightened, skilled and motivated learners using formal and non-formal channels of education. It is now even more critical than ever before for mankind as a whole to have a clear understanding of environmental concerns and to follow sustainable development practices. Teachers should be actively involved in the implementation of environmental education programs. Several measures and strategies have been considered to intervene. Among these is the use of school curriculum by teachers to impart knowledge to protect and preserve environment for sustainable development.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

Environmental education is an important, emerging discipline. In 1968, the UNESCO Biosphere Conference in Paris issued a declaration that there was a worldwide awareness of the field of EE. It was then defined as the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture, and his biophysical surroundings. EE also entails practice in decision making and self-formulation of a code of behavior about issues concerning environmental quality (Palmer 1998) (as cited in Kopnina 2012). UNESCO (1977) defines EE as constituting a “comprehensive, lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life, through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values”.

#### **The need and importance of environmental education are as follows:**

- a. **It improves academic achievement:** Environmental education helps to improve test scores by providing students with engaging topics about nature and biodiversity. Students can then apply this information to all subject areas and grades.
- b. **It breaks the indoor habit:** It offers a solution to the indoor lives of today's students and youth- their generation is the first to grow up indoors. Students experiencing school life with lots of play areas and grounds with diverse natural settings are more likely to be physically active, aware of good nutrition, imaginative and creative, and much more civil to one another.
- c. **It improves students' health:** It involves getting students outdoors and active and helps address various health problems in students today, such as depression, obesity, and attention deficit disorder.

- d. **It supports STEM:** Environmental education offers an engaging platform to gain and apply skills and knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).
- e. **It meets the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs:** It focuses on knowledge and skills important for succeeding in the future, such as investigating, questioning, analyzing, defining questions, reasoning, interpreting, solving issues, and developing solutions.
- f. **It cultivates leadership qualities:** Environmental qualities emphasize cooperative learning with others, critical thinking and discussions, and focuses on action strategies with real-world applications.
- g. **It improves focus and cognition:** Environmental education increases the ability of children to improve and focus their cognitive abilities. Students that have attention deficit disorder benefit from more exposure to nature. The greener a student's daily environment, the more manageable their symptoms are.
- h. **It creates enthusiastic students:** Environmental education offers several opportunities for hands-on, rich, real-world, and authentic learning across the curriculum. The relevance to children's lives inspires and engages them more than traditional pedagogy.
- i. **It fosters innovative leaders and teachers:** It enables teachers to take students outside more often and design more dynamic, interactive learning experiences that get students' attention.
- j. **It addresses academic standards:** Environmental education offers an engaging way to meet the skills and content identified in Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, C3 Framework for Social Studies, and Next Generation Science Standards.
- k. **It saves school money:** Students exploring and making efforts to improve the environmental performance of their school building and ground often cut costs in water, electricity, waste management, and more.
- l. **It fosters healthy schools:** Environmental education encourages students to create healthier and greener learning environments outside and inside their school building.
- m. **It supports sound decision-making:** It ensures that citizens are informed about science and equipped to make decisions that are vital to ensuring that the world has natural resources on which the economy and life depend.
- n. **It contributes to sustainability:** Environmental education builds the skills and knowledge necessary to address ecological problems and to take action to keep nature healthy, the economy productive, and communities vibrant.

- o. **It conserves natural resources:** The more people learn about the environment, the more pro-environment and conservation behaviour is seen. The more individuals know, the more likely they are to reduce, reuse, recycle, and conserve water and other resources.

### **IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN SCHOOLS**

Environmental awareness in schools is crucial because it not only enhances student's appreciation for our earth, but also promotes healthy behaviours, inspires future leaders, and improves the school environment.

Schools can promote environmental awareness through curriculum integration, outdoor learning opportunities, waste reduction programs, partnerships with local organizations, and hosting related events and activities. This can ultimately lead to a more environmentally conscious and responsible society, which is crucial for the long-term wellbeing of both humanity and the planet.

Although there exist many ways to promote environmental awareness in schools, here are some of the most effective ones:

- a. **Host Events and Activities:** Schools can host events and activities, such as guest speakers, film screenings, or nature festivals, to promote environmental awareness and encourage students to get involved in environmental issues.
- b. **Celebrate Days Dedicated to Environment:** There are days in a human calendar that are specially dedicated to the environment and its awareness creation such as World Environment Day on 5th June. We can get the kids to celebrate and understand the importance of such days in the calendar.
- c. **Integrate Environmental Themes into The Curriculum:** Incorporating environmental themes into the curriculum can help students learn about the natural world and the impacts that human actions have on the environment. This could include topics such as conservation, renewable energy, and pollution.
- d. **Set an Example:** As we know, Actions speak louder than words. We need to be an example for kids so that they can watch and learn from us. For example, Teachers in schools can all plant a tree and make the students follow them.
- e. **Implement Recycling and Waste Reduction Programs:** Schools can set up recycling programs and encourage students to reduce waste by using reusable containers and reducing their use of disposable products.
- f. **Encourage Outdoor Learning:** Taking students outside to learn about the environment and ecosystem can help to foster a greater appreciation for the environment. This could involve field trips, nature walks, or outdoor science lessons.

- g. **Partner With Local Organizations:** Schools can partner with local organizations, such as conservation groups or environmental NGOs, to promote environmental awareness and engage in conservation and restoration efforts.

**ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:** Environmental education helps individuals understand and address environmental issues and empowers them to make responsible decisions. Through this process, individuals learn to think critically and creatively about environmental problems and gain the skills and knowledge needed to take action and make a positive impact. As a result, they develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the world of nature and the role that they play in it.

There are many ways in which education on environmental awareness can empower society, but here are some key benefits:

- a. It helps students understand how the environment works and how human actions can impact the environment.
- b. Encourages students to become more aware of the impacts they have on the environment and fosters an understanding of our planet.
- c. Helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills by providing opportunities to explore and learn about environmental issues.
- d. Promotes healthy behaviors and habits, such as conserving resources and reducing waste.
- e. Inspire future leaders and encourage students to take action on environmental issues and work towards solutions.
- f. Improves the school environment by promoting sustainability and reducing waste.
- g. Through education, students who learn about sustainable agriculture practices will be able to apply those techniques in their local surroundings.
- h. Students who study environmental science can develop innovative technologies or draft policies that contribute to environmental protection.

From all this, we can understand that environmental education plays a vital role in promoting environmental awareness and fostering a broader understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

It can help students develop important skills and behaviors that will enable them to be responsible stewards of the environment and contribute to a more sustainable future.

**EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES:** Here are some strategies to enhance environmental education awareness among primary school teachers:

**Professional Development:**

- a. **Workshops and Trainings:** Organize workshops focused on environmental education, covering topics like climate change, sustainability, local ecosystems, and effective teaching methods for this age group.
- b. **Online Courses:** Offer online courses on environmental science and pedagogy, allowing teachers to learn at their own pace.
- c. **Conferences and Events:** Encourage participation in environmental education conferences and events to learn from experts and network with other educators.

#### **Resources and Support:**

- a. **Curriculum Materials:** Provide access to high-quality, age-appropriate curriculum materials aligned with environmental education standards. These can include lesson plans, activity guides, and multimedia resources.
- b. **Grants and Funding:** Offer grants or funding opportunities for teachers to develop innovative environmental education projects within their classrooms or schools.
- c. **Collaboration and Networking:**
- d. **Community Partnerships:** Partner with local environmental organizations, parks departments, or sustainability initiatives. This can facilitate field trips, guest speakers, and volunteer opportunities for students.
- e. **Teacher Networks:** Create online or in-person teacher networks focused on environmental education. This allows for sharing best practices, resources, and lesson ideas.
- f. **Mentorship Programs:** Connect experienced environmental educators with new teachers to provide guidance and support.

#### **Recognition and Incentives:**

- a. **Awards and Recognition:** Acknowledge and celebrate teachers who are effectively integrating environmental education into their classrooms.
- b. **Career Advancement Opportunities:** Offer opportunities for teachers specializing in environmental education to lead professional development programs or mentor other teachers.
- c. **Grants and Funding:** Offer grants to support teachers in developing innovative environmental education projects within their classrooms or schools.

#### **Engaging Activities:**

- a. **Curriculum Integration:** Provide age-appropriate curriculum materials that seamlessly integrate environmental themes into existing subjects like Science, Language Arts, and Math.

- b. **Field Trips and Project-Based Learning:** Facilitate field trips to nature centers, parks, or local conservation projects. Encourage project-based learning focused on environmental issues like water conservation or waste reduction.

**CONCLUSION:** Direct education is the most effective method across many parties' efforts to improve the quality of the environment. Long-term knowledge of environmental preservation will be more acceptable when a systematic and continuous method is implemented. Teachers in reality play a significant role as change agents and their actions and attitudes have a major effect on learners. Through use of competition to implement education for sustainable development is a form of encouragement for the school community to keep up the good work on education for sustainable development. Education field must be an effective way to produce a new generation full of positive knowledge, attitude, values, awareness, behaviour and practice for concern about our environment. Healthy environment gives a healthy life for humankind. So, let's love our environment together.

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