



Students' awareness and perception of environmental issues in Sivasagar District, Assam

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Abstract

Environmental education has emerged as a crucial component of contemporary learning as increasing human intervention continues to place pressure on ecological systems. It plays a vital role in equipping individuals with essential understanding, competencies, ethical values, and attitudes required to comprehend the complex interaction between society and the natural environment. The present study examines the significance of environmental education with particular emphasis on its influence in shaping students' awareness, sensitivity, and responsible conduct towards environmental conservation. The paper discusses how environmental education assists learners in identifying and understanding major environmental challenges such as environmental pollution, excessive exploitation of natural resources, global climate change, rapid urban expansion, and ecological degradation. It further analyses the contribution of educational institutions in fostering environmental learning through integrated curricula, experiential learning methods, co-curricular activities, and value-oriented instruction. Schools are viewed as key platforms for nurturing environmental consciousness and encouraging students to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives.

Keywords: Environmental education, students

Introduction

Environmental Education has emerged as a vital field of study in the contemporary era, particularly in the context of growing dependence of human society on natural resources and the increasing transformation of the physical environment through developmental processes. As human activities continue to influence ecological systems, understanding the intricate link between human life and the environment has become a necessity rather than a choice. In this context, Environmental Education serves as a structured learning process through which individuals acquire essential knowledge, comprehension, practical abilities, ethical values, and positive attitudes required to function responsibly within both natural and built environments. Environmental Education promotes awareness of a wide range of environmental concerns, including population pressure, environmental pollution, patterns of resource consumption, technological advancement, transportation systems, and the planning and management of urban as well as rural spaces. Through such awareness, learners are able to recognize the consequences of human actions on the overall environment and are encouraged to adopt practices that support environmental harmony and sustainability. It also emphasizes the rational use and conservation of natural resources while maintaining ecological stability. Furthermore, Environmental Education assists learners in identifying environmental values and understanding key concepts associated with environmental challenges. Scholars often describe Environmental Education as learning about the environment, learning for the protection of the environment, and learning through direct interaction with the environment. This approach stresses that education should go beyond theoretical knowledge and foster a sense of concern, responsibility, and active participation in environmental conservation. Chatterjee (2007) ^[1] pointed out that although human beings are largely responsible for the degradation of the natural environment, they also have the capacity to restore and protect ecological stability. According to the author, issues such as uncontrolled

population increase, rapid industrialization, lack of proper education, poor environmental consciousness, and persistent poverty play a major role in accelerating environmental decline. The study emphasizes the dual role of humans as both contributors to and potential solutions for environmental problems. Tuncer *et al.* (2007) identified environmental pollution as one of the most serious and persistent challenges facing the modern world, with little indication of decline in the immediate future. Their research highlighted that pre-service teachers possessed a strong awareness of their individual responsibility in mitigating environmental issues. The authors stressed that nurturing environmental consciousness among future educators is particularly important, as teachers significantly influence the environmental attitudes, values, and behaviours of future generations. Choudary (2010) conducted a study on the level of environmental awareness among college students and observed significant variations across different types of institutions. The findings indicated that students studying in aided colleges showed comparatively lower environmental awareness than those enrolled in government and private colleges. The study suggests that factors such as institutional support, availability of learning resources, and exposure to environmental education may play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of environmental concerns. Prakash (2014) ^[3] examined the role of Eco-clubs in enhancing environmental knowledge, attitudes, and environmentally responsible behaviour among students in Bangalore. The study concluded that participation in Eco-club activities positively influenced students' awareness and encouraged active involvement in environmental protection initiatives.

Objective

To examine the extent of environmental awareness among students with respect to different environmental issues.

Methodology

The target population of the present study comprised students enrolled in Classes I to VIII studying in Lower

Primary, Upper Primary, and High Schools located within the selected study area. Apart from students, the sample also included teachers, principals, education department officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and functionaries associated with the Amguri Education Block. The study was based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary information was obtained from official records maintained at the Gourisagar Block Office under the Amguri Education Block, the Census Office at Sivasagar, and various governmental and environmental agencies. These agencies included the Office of the Chief Conservator of Forests, the Assam Pollution Control Board, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. Supplementary data were collected from published reports on biodiversity and environmental issues, as well as from books, academic journals, newspapers, magazines, and online sources. Primary data were gathered through direct interaction with the selected respondents. Distinct interview schedules were designed for different categories of respondents, namely students, teachers, institutional heads, educational officials, and NGO representatives, to ensure the collection of relevant and group-specific information.

Analysis

The findings presented in the table reflect a high level of environmental awareness and positive engagement with environmental education among the respondents. A substantial proportion of students (90 per cent) reported being aware of Environmental Education, indicating that basic concepts related to the environment are well communicated within the school system. This is further supported by the fact that an equal percentage (90 per cent) demonstrated an understanding of the meaning of Environmental Education, suggesting that awareness is not merely superficial but is accompanied by conceptual clarity. The role of schools in promoting environmental awareness appears to be significant, as 88 per cent of the respondents acknowledged active involvement of their institutions in environmental awareness activities. This highlights the effectiveness of school-based initiatives in sensitizing students towards environmental issues. The near-universal celebration of World Environment Day, reported by 99 per cent of respondents, reflects strong institutional commitment to environmental observances and indicates that such events are widely used as platforms to promote environmental consciousness among students.

Student participation in practical environmental activities is also notably high. About 86 per cent of respondents confirmed their involvement in plantation programmes, demonstrating that schools encourage experiential learning through hands-on activities. Such participation plays a crucial role in translating theoretical knowledge into responsible environmental behaviour. Furthermore, 98 per cent of respondents reported active involvement of both students and teachers in maintaining a healthy and clean environment, pointing towards a collaborative approach within schools for environmental protection.

Significantly, all respondents (100 per cent) agreed that the present education system is effective in imparting environmental knowledge. This unanimous response suggests a strong confidence in the existing curriculum and pedagogical practices related to environmental education. Overall, the results indicate that environmental education is well integrated into the school system, fostering awareness,

participation, and positive attitudes among students, which is essential for developing environmentally responsible citizens.

Conclusion

The present study underscores the growing significance of Environmental Education in fostering environmental awareness and responsible behaviour among students. The findings clearly reveal that Environmental Education has been effectively integrated into the school system within the study area, enabling students to develop a sound understanding of environmental concepts and issues. A high level of awareness regarding Environmental Education and its meaning among students indicates that environmental learning is not limited to theoretical exposure but extends to conceptual clarity and value formation. The study also highlights the active role played by educational institutions in promoting environmental consciousness. Schools were found to be instrumental in organizing awareness programmes, celebrating important environmental events such as World Environment Day, and encouraging student participation in practical activities like plantation programmes. Such initiatives help bridge the gap between knowledge and action, thereby strengthening students' sense of responsibility towards environmental protection. Moreover, the collaborative involvement of both teachers and students in creating and maintaining a clean and healthy school environment reflects a positive institutional culture that supports sustainability-oriented practices.

References

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