



EXPLORING THE SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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Abstract: This paper explores the scope of environmental education in the National Policy on Education 2020 (NEP, 2020). The United Nations Declaration of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4), which focuses on quality education for sustainable development, is impossible to achieve without increasing environmental awareness and adopting practical approaches in education to teach an orientation for bringing change. As the climate crisis is becoming a cause of concern on a day-to-day basis, education can serve as one of the best ways to control the rising problem. The Ministry of Education emphasizes NEP 2020's role in the proper integration of environmental awareness and responsiveness towards enhancing conservation and promoting sustainable development. The study asserts that the recognition of environmental education as a multidisciplinary subject is crucial, as it aids in understanding the complex interaction of the environment and society. Moreover, understanding localized or context-specific environmental issues is the need of the hour. Therefore, proper implementation of NEP 2020 has a poignant role to play in fulfilling the educational objectives in the context of Environmental Education for sustainable development.

Index Terms - Environmental Education, NEP 2020, Multidisciplinary, Sustainable Development, Curriculum

I. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is certainly occurring, and its harrowing impacts on the environment and people's livelihoods are substantial (Maja et al., 2022). Climate-related changes have already been observed globally, including rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, unpredictable rainfalls, frequent flooding, water scarcity, droughts, and more. Human beings and other existing species is vulnerable to climate change, and it will continue to rise in the upcoming times (Pandipat & Abel, 2022). As the climate crisis becomes a daily concern, it is becoming evident how it affects those who are inequitably situated by various socioeconomic factors. This underscores the importance of fostering collective commitment to integrating climate consciousness into curriculum in Indian education.

The concept of environmental education in India dates back to ancient times. At that time, people lived in harmony with nature. Environmental protection and the judicious use of natural resources began with the consequences of environmental deterioration and the necessity of conservation for human life. Every religion and culture in India emphasize environmental concerns while representing their traditions and societal viewpoints. Nature is viewed as an all-encompassing force in Indian culture. 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 conservation

as well as religious rituals and prohibitions against the excessive exploitation of natural resources (Swaroop & Verma, 2022). Indian education introduced a multidisciplinary strategy in ancient Vedic education. In the Indian gurukul system, students were required to master the subjects of Indian literature, science, astronomy, logic, geometry, human values, communication skills, and vocational skills (Srivastava, 2022).

The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in the year 1972 catalyzed a global environmental awakening, prompting India to reassess its approach. The Stockholm Declaration in 1972 emphasized the need for an environmentally oriented education system to resolve the environmental crisis by preparing environmentally conscious citizens. The protection of environment is possible through education, to make people aware of the environmental crisis and to control pollution. Thus, Environmental education focuses on the facets of human behavior that are more closely connected to how a person interacts with and comprehends their biophysical environment. Through environmental education, people may learn about environmental problems and find solutions to protect the environment. People have a greater grasp of environmental concerns as a result, and they are more equipped to make wise choices (Swaroop & Verma, 2022). Mahatma Gandhiji, in 1937, made a serious attempt in creating interconnections among society, man, and nature through education through his Basic Education scheme in India. Subsequently, the National Policy on Education in 1986 acknowledged the significance of environmental education and emphasized its integration into the curriculum. The integration of environmental education into the Indian education system is an important area to promote sustainable behavior of learners. This includes creating awareness about environment and to understand the environmental issues. This knowledge developing the necessary skills for sustainable development.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES OF INDIA

The first education policy of India, NPE 1968 did not recommend about Environmental Education. The second National Policy on Education 1986, later modified in 1992 emphasized on protection and the significance of the environment, teaching in schools and colleges should be guided by environmental consciousness (Baskar, n.d.). Further, in 2003, the Honorable Supreme Court of India made Environmental Education compulsory at all stages of education nationwide. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was instructed to prepare a model syllabus for Environmental Education.

Some of the earlier efforts by the Indian government to integrate Environmental Education into academic curricula included the introduction of environmental education as a compulsory subject at the undergraduate level by the University Grants Commission (UGC), School level by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) and State Education Boards (Baskar, n.d.). One of the huge drawbacks of this approach was the oversimplified solutions to the rising environmental problems where simplistic concepts such as deforestation are bad and planting trees as a mere solution lack providing holistic information to the students (Narlanka, 2017). Some of the challenges that can be associated with Environmental education are curriculum gaps and a lack of teacher training facilities for Environmental education. Moreover, the casual attitude towards the subject of Environmental Education backed by flexible evaluation and denial of provision for hands-on experience wasn't able to fulfill the purpose of sensitization. Therefore, with an aim for effective implementation, the recently launched National Education Policy of 2020 stresses the proper integration of environmental awareness and responsiveness towards the promotion of conservation and sustainable development in the academic curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2023). The National Education Policy (NEP) of India 2020 is a transformative framework that envisions the future of education in the country based on a holistic approach to environmental conservation (Ramesh, 2022). It emphasizes a departure from rote learning towards a holistic development model that encompasses cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical dimensions (Ramesh, 2022). It also stresses the inclusion of environmental awareness through the incorporation of traditional Indian knowledge systems and inculcates a sense of respect for the environment, without which the future is bleak for all species on earth (Ministry of Education, 2023).

NEP-2020 provides us with a roadmap for reclaiming, re-articulating and restructuring the Bhartiya self for becoming a global leader (Vishwaguru) where equity, equality and fraternity will be celebrated (Kumari, 2021).

III. NEP 2020 AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

NEP 2020, the first education policy of the 21st century, has given importance to sustainable development and recommended course contents and credit requirements. NEP 2020 has proposed a comprehensive and integrated approach to fostering environmental literacy in schools. The policy has recognized the importance of environmental education for achieving the national and global goals of sustainable development and environmental justice. It has also acknowledged the need to reform and revitalize the existing curriculum and pedagogy to make them more relevant, engaging, and effective for environmental learning. It has further emphasized the role of teachers, school complexes, and assessment systems in facilitating and enhancing environmental literacy among students (Saluja, 2016).

The NEP 2020 focuses on [sustainability](#) through environmental education across all levels of education, from primary to higher education. This includes raising awareness of environmental issues, promoting sustainable behavior, and developing the skills necessary for sustainable development. NEP 2020 is an inclusive educational policy that provides recommendations for all levels of education which was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020. The policy has holistic and multidisciplinary approach. In NEP 2020 integration of environmental education in Indian education system is a major thrust area to meet the need for sustainability. The policy is aligned with the global education development agenda, SDG 4. The target of SDG4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. NEP 2020 promotes quality education to achieve the goal of sustainable development (Saluja, 2024).

NEP 2020 recommend for National Curriculum Framework to integrate the concepts of Environmental Education to develop the environmental concern throughout the school curriculum. The knowledge of curriculum will help students to develop core human values- respect for all living beings, respect for nature and will feel the beauty of nature. The student should also get the opportunity to learn about the environmental challenges and rational use of resources (NCFSE, 2023). In the school curriculum, the policy keeps some provisions for hands-on activities. The significant bottleneck lies in the existing curriculum gaps related to environmental education that limits students' ability to understand the interconnected nature of environmental issues and hampers the development of a holistic perspective. It requires a reevaluation and restructuring of the curriculum to ensure a seamless infusion of environmental principles into diverse subjects to promote environmental awareness among the younger generation (Ramesh, 2022). Therefore, this policy attempts to take into account the common issues on learning environment and proposes various measures to keep it in top shape and form (Swaroop & Verma, 2022).

NEP 2020 curriculum and credit framework includes Environmental Education as Value Added Course (VAC) as per UGC guidelines. Enrichment of multidisciplinary knowledge at the higher education level is an important approach of NEP 2020, which is followed by the implementation of Environmental Education as a multidisciplinary subject at the higher education level. The policy recommends that higher education offer credit-based courses and projects related to community engagement, service, and Environmental Education (Ramesh, 2022). The objective of Environmental Education at the UG level is to equip students with the ability to apply the acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values when required. It will also enable students to take appropriate measures to address the effects of environmental degradation, climate change, pollution, forest and wildlife conservation, and sustainable development and living. It is expected that the knowledge of the value-added course will improve the quality of life in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

The nature of environmental problems caused by ongoing climate change is unique to each area. So, textbook publishers need to observe the unique nature of the environment, capturing localized issues so that students can understand the problems of a particular area to develop knowledge on the right track. Addressing the environmental or climate-related problem solely as a scientific problem does not serve the purpose; it should be addressed as a socio-economic problem. It is imperative to note that certain sections of society face the hard-hitting challenges of environmental problems such as floods, droughts, and outbreaks of disease. Moreover, certain policy approaches can be adopted to build environmental awareness among the student community. It requires a more holistic approach that involves various stakeholders across educational institutions. The approach to increasing environmental awareness through education should be based on the local context, where students gain

a sense of sustainable practices and enhance their skills to address environmental challenges. Certain measures must be taken at all levels of education to encourage students to foster green campuses and the rational use of natural resources. Other things could include raising teachers' awareness of environmental education.

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