

INSTILLING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN CHILDREN: A STUDY ON THE ROLE PLAYED BY SOCIETY, SCHOOL AND ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Environment refers to the place where living and non-living things exist on the earth's surface. But the unscrupulous greed of Homo Sapiens put the entire globe in danger. So environmental protection become the need of the hour. Protection of environment is the duty of Homo Sapiens. But who else can protect environment than children can? Unlike grownups, kids' minds are like white sheets of paper, whatever is imprinted on it will last for long. Environmental awareness should be in the conscious mind of a child from a very young age onwards. The present paper is an attempt to study the role of society, school and English classrooms in inculcating the need to protect environment for a healthy future. The paper delves deep into the salient role played by the English classrooms in imparting environmental awareness in learners. The paper analyses whether the pedagogic activities in English classrooms are capable of instilling environmental consciousness in the young learners. By highlighting the activities of various school organizations as well as governmental organizations and school textbooks, with special reference to English readers of Kerala State, the paper delineates the pivotal position of the state school curriculum of Kerala in imparting the environmental consciousness in young children. The study was conducted in three ways: by analysing the different Readers prescribed for English at High School level, by observing the institutional practices in and around, and on the basis of the classroom practices that can be brought about through the English classrooms. The long-term experience that the first author has in devising and designing the classroom practices for English and the wishes of the second author, who is a prospective teacher, to bring forth the practices which can instil environmental consciousness in children through English classrooms made us prepare the paper. The authors hope that these types of awareness instilling programmes, in and outside the classrooms, will help the learners to sensitize themselves and delve into actions in the future to protect the environment.

Keywords: *Environmental Awareness, Pedagogic Activities, Environmental Consciousness.*

Introduction

Environment refers to the place where living and nonliving things exist on the earth's surface. It is the space where human beings, other creatures and inanimate things live harmoniously. But as time moves on, human attitude towards natural environment has undergone tremendous and drastic changes. The unscrupulous greed of Homo Sapiens put the entire globe in danger. So environmental protection become the need of the hour. It is one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals of UN.

It is the responsibility of the people of the present generation to conserve, preserve and sustain nature for a prosperous tomorrow. Protection of environment is the duty of Homo Sapiens; since the perishing condition of the blue planet is due to human action. But who else can protect environment than children can? Unlike grownups, kids' minds are like white sheets of paper, whatever is imprinted on it will last for long. Environmental awareness should be in the conscious mind of a child from a very young age onwards.

The present paper is an attempt to study the role of society, school and English classrooms in inculcating the need to protect environment for a healthy future. The paper delves deep into the salient role played by the English classrooms in imparting environmental awareness in learners. The paper analyses whether the pedagogic activities in English classrooms are capable enough for instilling

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environmental consciousness in the young learners. By highlighting the activities of various school organizations as well as governmental organizations and school textbooks, with special emphasize to the English Readers of Kerala State, the paper delineates the pivotal position of the state school curriculum of Kerala in imparting the environmental consciousness in young children.

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Role of Society in Inculcating Environmental Awareness in Children

- **Environmental Awareness through Family:** Children learn the first step in the ladder of socialization from their home. One's home is a miniature society. Family is the basic unit of the society. Early lessons of social life begin from the family. Children acquire moral values and virtues from their parents. So that it is the responsibility of parents to impart and nurture the concern to protect environment in their children from a very early age. Because whatever is imprinted in the mind of children will last for long and it will influence their actions too. Elders should teach children the fact that without nature life on earth won't be possible. It is the Mother nature who supplies necessary resources for livelihood. Devoid of natural resources human existence will be in trouble. Even though elder members of human society know this fact, majority are unmindful of this truth. As a result, they exploit the natural resources at its peak, without even thinking about the future generations. Several governmental and non-governmental agencies strive their level best to generate environmental consciousness in Homo Sapiens around the world. Even then, incorporating environmental awareness in children from a very young age can do a lot to save our perishing earth.

Children should be provided the opportunity to play with natural resources in their childhood. But there is a tendency among the present generation parents to separate their children from nature. This attitude should be changed first. Because this tendency will create negative impact in the minds of children on nature and its abundant resources and creatures. So that they should be given ample freedom to explore the wide variety of organisms in Mother nature. On special occasions such as birthday, environment day, wedding day, naming ceremony and so on children should be given instructions to plant trees and nurture it for a prosperous future. Children should be taught the lessons to have a harmonious co-existence with nature from the family itself. They should be taught the lessons such as killing insects and animals, cutting plants and trees, leveling hills and fields etc. are harmful and it will hinder the peaceful co-existence for living beings on Mother earth. Similarly, without other creatures of nature, human existence on earth surface is impossible. Elders should be good role models for their children. They must be ideal figures for children. Because the lion share of human behavior is influenced by the actions and activities of elders. If the elder members of the family plant tree, encourage and make out children about the need for afforestation, the young children will do the same. As Piaget suggested, children are good imitators of the actions, words, and activities of their parents.

- **Social Organizations and Environmental Consciousness:** Social organizations which can be both governmental or non-governmental also play a pivotal role in inculcating environmental awareness in children. These agencies organize programmes in various schools to strengthen environmental consciousness in young minds. In Kerala, *Mathrubhumis* one of the renowned and leading newspapers and it plays a crucial role in imparting the need to protect and preserve environment through various schools. The SEED (Student Empowerment through Environmental Development) programme of *Marhrubhumis* innovative innovations in this field. Several schools across Kerala are a part of this initiative of *Mathrubhumi*. As part of the programme numerous activities have been done to save our Mother Earth. The programmes of school Eco club and Nature club began to be strengthened with *Mathrubhumi* SEED. As a result, students began to actively engage in agriculture, poultry farming, plastic recycling, afforestation, protection of water resources, conservation of mangroves, and so on. This initiative of *Mathrubhumi* also encourages students to do further by providing certain awards. SEED awards include Vishishta Haritha Vidyalayam Award, Shreshta Haritha Vidyalayam Award, Haritha Vidyalayam Award, Special Jury Award, Best Teacher Coordinator Award and Gem of SEED Award.

- **Initiatives of the State Government:** Equivalently, the government of Kerala, especially the Department of Forest and Wildlife, provides saplings of plants to school children every year on the environment day and as a follow up activity the children are asked to record the growth of their plant regularly. With great enthusiasm children nurture their plants and in the following year also they are supplied with a new variety of plant and the cycle continues. This initiative of the Govt. of Kerala aims to inculcate the need for afforestation in the young minds.

Our society plays a salient role in generating the need to conserve, preserve and transmit our environment for a prosperous tomorrow. Young generation is the torch bearers of a better future. They should be moulded in such a way that from a very early age they must be convinced the fact that our environment is not only for our generation alone but for coming generations too. Hence it is our own responsibility to sustain the natural resources for a healthy tomorrow. Whatever qualities a child acquire in the childhood will remain in his or her the behavioral patterns till death.

Role Played by Schools in Imparting Environmental Consciousness in Children

Schools are the centers of learning. They are the second homes for young children. Children are being moulded as better and responsible citizens from these institutions. Teachers, other learners and learning environment influence the behavior of a child in the school. The behavior of children is modified through the training given from the school by the teachers. School children give more importance and attach more value to the words of their teachers than their parents. Children have the tendency to swallow whatever is taught to them by their teachers. Hence teachers can also take the role of an environmental protectors along with the role of content and language experts.

- **School Curriculum as a Tool:** Curriculum also plays a significant role in building environmental consciousness within children. Curriculum is the total experience that a child receives from a school. The state school syllabus of Kerala included Environmental Science as one of its teaching subjects from the primary class onwards with an aim to inculcate environmental awareness in children. Hence it helps children to know more about nature and natural resources from a very young age onwards. It gives a vivid picture regarding various plants, trees, insects, and animals on earth, importance of air, water and soil, about living and non-living things, terrestrial and water beings, importance of ecosystem, parts of plants and trees etc. to the primary school children while different aspects of environmental degradation, importance of food chain in our sustenance, role of different fungus and bacteria in human existence, about coral reefs and its diversity, diverse organisms in sea, etc. are taught to the secondary school children. In the higher secondary level, students are taught about the environment in detail.
- **Role of Clubs:** All the subjects taught to children impart the need to protect, preserve, and conserve nature for a better tomorrow. Apart from this, school clubs such as Nature club, Eco club, Bhoomithrasena club etc. also help students to develop environmental consciousness. These clubs which are working under the school system offer ample opportunities to children to interact with one's surroundings. Children are provided the opportunities to work in field, plant trees, maintaining hygienic situations in the public places, watering plants, visiting paddy fields and orchards, protecting and cleaning water bodies and so on. Now a days most of the children are restricted with in the four walls of their homes and thus they are separated from nature and her resources. Hence there exists a lacuna between the child and the environment. However, to an extend the school clubs provide opportunities for the children to interact with nature.
- **Role of School Organizations:** Similar to the school clubs, various school organizations such as National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Service Scheme(NSS), Bharat Scout and Guides, Junior Red Cross (JRC), Student Police Cadet (SPC) etc. in one way or the other help to instill environment consciousness in children. These school organizations organize community extension programmes to obtain maximum participation of children in various activities of the society. So that it helps children to understand the need of the society. Environmental protection is the current need of the society. Our world is perishing day by day due to the human actions and thus through the societal interaction children recognize the need to protect Mother nature for a better future. On certain occasions such as Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti, and so on children come to the heart of the society and without any inhibition children clean the surroundings. Similarly, these school organizations also play a pivotal role in making their schools plastic free. Equivalently now a days State School Festivals of Kerala is plastic free with the help of these organizations.

Environmental Awareness through English Classrooms

Unlike content subject classrooms, language classrooms are favorite classrooms for the students. It is in the language classrooms children are provided the opportunities to freely interact with the co-learners through language games, discussions, debates, watching movies, listening to beautiful and inspiring tales and so on. In language classrooms children are not passive listeners, but active participants in the teaching learning process. In addition to this, language classrooms offer additional practice in the basic language skills. English language classrooms help learners to learn the second language. But at the same, English classrooms are powerful enough to impart environmental consciousness in the learners.

- **Units on Environment:** The textbooks of English are designed by the curriculum framers of Kerala State Board of Education, in such a way that, certain units of the English are to discuss environmental issues. The present paper analyses the English readers of State Syllabus of Kerala from class VIII to X. The paper focuses on the textbooks of these classes because the students of these classes belong to the category of adolescence. They are the linker group between the childhood and the adulthood. They are going to be the responsible citizens. They need to be encouraged to protect the nature and her valuable resources. The pupils belonging to this group are promising members for a better tomorrow and they should be given proper awareness regarding the role of environment for a healthy tomorrow.
- **Text book analysis, Standard VIII:** The fourth unit of Eighth standard English Reader is titled "Flowers and Showers". This unit delineates the role played by nature in individuals' life and the responsibility of human beings to nurture nature. The unit is further sub divided into four subunits. The first sub unit is a poem, "Song of the Flower", which is about a flower and how it is linked to the Mother nature. It picturizes the link between different seasons and the life of a flower. "First Showers" by Nalini Sharma forms the second subunit of this unit. Poetess speaks about the wonderful depiction of nature's ability to heal the stress of human beings. Rain, one of the wonderful natural phenomena, is described as a soothing balm for human beings who are exhausted by huge back log of work. Third subunit titled "The Nightingale and the Rose", is a story written by Oscar Wilde. The story is about the sacrifices made by a nightingale for human love. The story vividly depicts the in grateful attitude of Homo Sapiens towards the faithful and grateful beings on earth. The prose lesson teaches students the valuable lesson that all creatures on earth should be treated as important as human beings. The last subunit is also a prose lesson by Anton Chekov titled, "A Day in the Country", which delineates the influence of nature on human beings.
- **Text book analysis of Standard IX:** "Care for the Morrow" is the third unit in the ninth standard English Reader. The first subunit is titled "Song of the Rain", which portrays the beautiful natural phenomenon of rain. The beauty of the rain is beautifully described in the poem by the poet. The wonderful portrayal of the rain enthralls the listeners to the enchanting beauty of the nature. The second subunit is a play, *Listen to Mountain* written by Kavery Nambisan which talks about the exploitation of the nature and her resources by the Homo Sapiens. The play makes the learners aware of the after effect of the destruction or leveling of hills. It teaches the learners a moral lesson that natural resources and nature are very much essential for the existence of the man on earth. The third reading passage is titled "Climate Change is not a Hysteria- It's a Fact" is a speech delivered by Leonard Dicaprio in UN Climate Summit. All the three sub units in the unit discussed proclaim the need to protect our environment. The subunits announce the fact that environmental protection is the need of the hour. These reading passages reflect the unscrupulous greed of human beings to engulf the natural resources. Also, the various literary pieces discussed in the unit unravels the universal truth that threat to mother earth will put human life in danger and the need to care earth for a better tomorrow.
- **Analysis of the English Reader of Standard X:** Unit one in tenth standard English Reader comprises of three subunits and it projects the amiable relationship between man and nature. The first subunit is titled, "Adventures in a Banyan Tree", which is a short story written by Ruskin Bond. It portrays the jovial childhood of the writer blended with enchanting nature. The second reading passage is a short story by Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, and is titled "The Snake and The Mirror". The story depicts the harmony between man and other beings in nature. The concluding sub unit is a poem, "Lines Written in Early Spring" by William Wordsworth on the human attitude to separate himself from the joy of nature and spending time to fight to one another. These sub units give a better insight to the learners on the need for a harmonious coexistence between man and the creatures of nature.

- **Pedagogic Activities that Nurture Environmental Consciousness:** The discussion of these texts alone won't make the learners aware of the immediate need to conserve, preserve and nurture nature for a healthy future. **Illustrative examples** provided to the learners should be in tune nature and environmental issues. Teachers usually provide the learners illustrative examples to understand the concepts or meaning of difficult words. During these situation teachers have to make use of environment as the major source for examples. In order to make the learners understand the vocabulary situations in reading passages other than those subunits discussing environmental issues, situations and events related to Mother Earth can be employed. In such occasions learning vocabulary and environmental consciousness occurs simultaneously. The same strategy can be employed to learn **grammar elements**. The examples provided to while learning grammar can be taken from the environmental issues. Here too, learning grammar will be accompanied by an awareness on environment.
- **Discourse Construction:** Various discourses can be used to inculcate environmental awareness in children. The discourses such as stories, poems, letters, articles, newspaper reports, posters etc. discussing environmental issues can be given to the students to read and also the same can be used to make the readers aware of the need to nurture nature. They should also be prompted to prepare similar discourses and to spread awareness among the members of their society with the same.
- **Pedago-Literary Meetings** should be conducted in classrooms to discuss the works related to natural calamities, man-made and natural disasters and so on. It will aid the learners to have a better understanding of the works related to these issues and to have a deeper understanding of the destruction of the environment caused by human actions and its impact on human existence. These kinds of meetings give a broader understanding to the learners on the global need to nurture nature for a better and prosperous tomorrow. It gives them opportunities to involve in critical thinking and to ponder over human deeds.
Equivalently, **discussions and debates** should be organized as a class activity or a whole school activity to ensure students participation in environmental issues. Through discussions and debates, the students acquire a better understanding of different dimensions of the various issues that pop up in the course of time, related to environment. The topics such as plastic wastes, plastic recycling, innovations to reduce plastic wastes, air pollution causes and effects, deforestation, role of factories in pollution etc. can be used for debates and discussions. Along with the ability to instill environment consciousness, these activities in English classrooms helps a lot in developing language competency. Language is a skill and thus through practice one can acquire a good command over the language. Hence, it is possible to practice over the skill of listening and speaking through debates and discussions.
- **Readings on Environment:** Numerous literary texts are being written on the theme of environment and climatic changes by several writers across the globe. Students should be given these kinds of literary works, which discuss climatic changes and its impact upon the globe, to read. It will help to improve their skill of reading. At the same time, these literary texts help the children to make the impact of these issues on the globe. Through these fictional and non-fictional works, children could anticipate the fact that the end of the blue planet is emerging, if the exploitation continues.
- **Eco Literature and Cli-Fi Novels:** Eco literature includes those literary works which discusses environmental issues. Cli-fi (climatic fiction) is an offshoot of eco literature and it depicts the changes in the climate. These types of works make the readers ponder over human actions. Students can be provided these types of works which help to improve their skill of reading and simultaneously it builds environmental consciousness in children. Such texts make the young readers aware of the fact that human beings are destroying the nature and her valuable resources. Popular eco fictions include: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, *The Drowned World* by JG Ballard, *The Over story* by Richard Powers, *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *Truth and Consequences* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Entanglement* by Vandana Singh and so on.
- **Staging of Plays:** Popular plays related to the theme of environment can be staged in classrooms to instill environmental awareness in the learners. Plays discussing the environmental issues include: *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell, *Earthquakes in London* by Milke Bartlett, *The Contingency Plan* by Steve Waters and so on. Dramas can influence the students a lot. It enhances their skill of listen and at the same time it helps to instill environmental awareness.

- **Screening of Films:** Similarly films which picturize climatic changes, the need to protect nature etc. can be screened in the classrooms. Several films are being released on the emerging issues on environment. These films in one way or the other share valuable message to the viewers on the urgency to conserve and protect nature for a healthy tomorrow. Films offer audio-visual mode of communication and it is one of the most effective means for making the readers bother about the environmental protection. Popular films which can be staged in classrooms include: *2012* by Harald Kloser and Roland Emmerich, *Avatar* by James Cameron, *Beyond the Pole* by David L Williams, *H2O* by Upendra, *Noah* by Darren Aronofsky and so on.
- **Listening to the speech of Renowned Environmentalists:** Students can be motivated by giving them the opportunity to listen to speeches by renowned environmentalists. The speeches of Greta Thunberg, Leonard Dicaprio, etc. can be played in classrooms and it helps children a lot to know more about the causes and effects of environmental degradation.

To conclude, English classrooms are powerful platforms for imparting environmental consciousness and awareness in children. Language learning and building consciousness among children to protect environment for a healthy and prosperous tomorrow take place through English classrooms. The authors hope that these types of awareness instilling programmes, in and outside the classrooms, will help the learners to sensitize themselves and delve into actions in the future to protect the environment.

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