

REFOCUSING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR RELEVANCE AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Environmental education (EE) is widely acknowledged as an important part of the environmental conservation process. In this paper an attempt has been made to define environment and environmental education (EE) from several viewpoints. The paper briefly discusses the relevance of EE for sustainable national development and the factors threatening it were also highlighted. Finally it discusses the contributions of science to EE and some recommendations were proffered.

Introduction

The problems of an advanced technological society are no longer the concern of a small group of experts and high-level decision makers. They are already the issues of the modern equivalent to marketplace. The term environment now occupies a central place in the endless documentation of our ills, misfortunes, hopes and aspirations and the term Environmental Education (EE) has become a major concern of many teachers.

Environmental Education (EE) is widely acknowledged as an important part of the environmental conservation process. Over many decades, its development has taken place with remarkable speed in various parts of the world as well as in Nigeria.

But despite the fact that conspicuous developments in the field of Environmental Education (EE) has occurred since the discussion about its definition and goals at the IUCN conference in Nevada (USA) in 1970 the way in which such development have taken place is by no means systematic (Chengo, 1994).

There are many differences today in the way environmental education is practiced. In developing countries lack of finance and materials are prominent factors that hinder sustainability of EE.

Also lack of official policies for environmental education within the education framework militates against the widespread use of EE (Abdullahi, 1998).

But what does the term Environmental Education (EE) mean? Is it anything more than a slogan, a bandwagon, or a basis of polemical statements? Might it suitably be understood and developed to herald a new approach to the teaching of both sciences and the humanities?

This paper not only tried to define environmental education, but also briefly discusses the relevance of EE for sustainable national development and the factors militating against it. It also discusses the contribution of science to EE and finally, highlights some recommendations for sustainability of EE in Nigeria.

Environmental Education

The word environment is a very wide concept. It encompasses the aspect of physical and social conditions in any given situation.

However, to an 'environmentalist', the working definition of an environment refers to the physical environment. According to Bichi (1997), the environment " is anything that isn't me.

Environmental Education (EE) has been defined by Ononugbo (2005), as the process of helping people through formal and non formal/ informal education, to acquire understanding, skills, and values that will enable them to participate as active and informed citizens in the development of an ecologically sustainable and socially just society.

Environmental education according to ASEAN, as cited in Ononugbo (2005), is very important in sensitizing people, particularly students, as it helps in developing the right environmental ethic and building an environmentally responsive and responsible society.

Factors Threatening Sustainable Environmental Education

According to Ononugbo (2005), Nigeria and other Southeast Asian Nations member countries have the following constraints militating against environmental science or environmental education.

- (a) Insufficient training materials as well as supplementary and reference materials on the environment.
- (b) Lack of public initiative or EE and difficulty in encouraging public participation in environmental activities.
- (c) Not enough networking or coordination among Governmental Organization (GOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in planning and implementing environmental activities.
- (d) Lower environmental interest in tertiary institutions compared with that in primary and secondary schools.
- (e) Difficulty of teaching the affective component of EE, considering that most environmental education values education.
- (f) The limited baseline information on the local/regional environment can be used in the preparation of textbooks and reference for EE.
- (g) **Lack of finance by the government for sustainable EE**

Relevance of Environmental Education For Sustainable National Development

The principle of sustainable development the world over stems from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. Its central document Agenda 21, defines sustainable development as "global partnership for economically viable, socially equitable, ecologically sound development not only for today but also for the future.

The Brundtland Commission Report of 1987, "Our common future" had defined sustainable development, as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This principle of sustainable development is related to all aspects of life whether ecological, natural resources, economics, socio-cultural or political environments, among others.

However, the demand for sustainability of EE arises from the increasing concern about the degradation of our environment and the different adverse effects on it (the environment). In this regard, sustainable Environmental Education (EE) system is one that is based on research and development, aimed at addressing the problems affecting the environment and improving the environment through the adaptation of appropriate technologies.

Among the priority concerns of Nigeria and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations member countries is how to promote greater awareness of local/ national environmental problems among the youths in school, adults in government and rest of the population (Ononugbo, 2005).

Different organizations and institutions already are focusing on specific aspect of concerns, causes and consequences, of environmental mismanagement and are carrying out various programs of activity and most of these activities can be broadly described as educational. For example, often people who live and work closely to the environment, like the wetland areas, do receive informal education that prepares them for their own local management roles. However, due to new knowledge, new pressures and new problems, this is often not sufficient, On the other hand, and worse still, the education of those whose lives are insulated from the natural environment, the city dwellers, often has little or no relevance to their own environmental roles and responsibilities.

In this circumstances, it is difficult to see, how as individuals in a complex society we can make a direct impact on decisions about the environment that are made by people in government and industry whom we do not know, whom we do not see and whom we have no access to. For these reasons, everybody needs to be given and has, a right to receive environmental component to the overall education entitlement that they receive through their lives.

Contributions of Science to Environmental Education

Before examining what contributions science education has made and is making to environmental education within any curriculum, it is considered that the aims of environmental education approach should be:

=> To develop the idea that change is in general explicable even though, there may be many Variables to take into account.

=> To prepare pupils for a more active part in the process of social and technological change. This can be by:

- (a) Increasing their awareness of all aspects of their environment and the way they interact. Particular emphasis should be given to the inter-relationships between elements; natural environment, societies and their cultures, science and technology, communities and individuals.
- (b) Increasing their awareness of the many factors that involve decision-making and in which historical, economic, political, social and technological considerations are included.
- (c) Encouraging them to formulate productive questions concerning the relationship between society and technological development. This will include some of the following questions:-

- Who is going to benefit?
- Who is going to suffer?
- What are the alternatives?
- " Have I enough information to make a valid judgment?
- Do I approve what is happening?
- What sort of action can I take in order to participate?

- (d) Increasing their confidence and articulation so that they can operate individually and cooperatively in a group.
- (e) Increasing their knowledge of public communication channels and exploring the means by which individuals and groups might use to maximize their control over their social situation.

In the context of the above aims of environmental education, it is strongly felt that the specific contributions of the science area of the curriculum should be and have been:

- (a) To establish the major scientific theories about matter, energy and living things.
- (b) To use these theories to explain natural processes, cycles and controls at work in the environmental systems.
- (c) To show how the application of scientific knowledge does and could affect:
 - Natural environmental system
 - " Individuals
 - Communities
 - National and world developments.
- (d) To help pupils develop the ability to approach problems in a scientific way but at the same time to be aware that certain problems may not lead themselves to this approach.
- (e) To examine the interactions between science, technology, environment, communities, economics, politics and values (beliefs). Thereby, shows that decision concerning science and technology involve other considerations, which may be of public interest and great importance.
- (f) To include environmental education's issues in teaching, which need to take into account the following three (3) inter-linked components which comprises of:-
 - (i) Education about the environment (i.e. Basic knowledge and understanding of the environment)
 - (ii) Education for the environment, (i.e. concerned with values, ' attitudes and positive action for the environment),
 - (iii) Education in or through the environment (i.e. using the environment as a resources with emphasis on enquiry and investigation and pupils firsthand experience).

Furthermore, the contribution of science can further be analyzed in terms of the important ideas or concepts that the pupils will need to understand. Many of these concepts are drawn from the natural sciences but clearly some have to be drawn basically from the area of social science. Some of these important ideas according to Chengo (1994), can be drawn from the following areas:-

- Matter
- Cycle processes
- Energy changes
- " Variety of life

- Effects of inheritance and environment
- Man's control of the environment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby put forward for sustainability of EE for relevance and national development.

- (1) Everybody should be given and, has a right to receive environmental component to the overall education entitlement that they receive through their lives.
- (2) People should intervene purposefully in the process of change and to ensure that this intervention is directed by insight and understanding.
- (3) Different organizations and institutions should focus on specific aspects of concerns, causes and consequences of environmental mismanagement and should carry out various programmes of activity, and
- (4) The government at the local, state and national levels should adequately fund such programmes.
- (5) Networking between governmental and non-governmental organizations should be encouraged for sustainable EE in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The educational response to the concerns of the Environmental Education (EE) must be seen in much broader terms both in context and targets. What must be remembered is the fact that wherever we live, whatever our lifestyles, we are all involved. We are all tied into ways of life by tradition and social conservations developed and promoted by the schooling we do or do not receive, the faiths we cling, to the jobs we do, the books we read, the stories our parents tell us, the Newspapers, T.V. and Radio. All of these forces play a part in our total education, influencing the way we view our world, the way we behave, and the skills that we use in our daily lives. Therefore, if any education has to be meaningful and if any changes to ways of life are to be achieved, all of these forces need to be targeted and mobilized. Education influences must upgrade the quality of decision-making about environmental use and also upgrade the quality of skills that enable people to make personally satisfying practical use of the environment.

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