

TEACHING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (EE) IN NIGERIA PRIMARY SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Environmental protection and conservation has been a global issue. Its promotion is further enhanced by the subject known as Environmental Education (EE). Environmental Education has been identified as an intervention strategy for improving the quality of the environment and enhances development. Therefore, the paper looks at the teaching of Environment Education in the hierarchy of education. This paper takes critical look at the purpose of primary education. It stresses the meaning of Environmental Education (EE) and the rationale for the teaching of Environmental Education in the primary schools. It also highlights the problems and prospects of teaching Environmental Education (EE) in Primary Schools.

Introduction

The purpose of Primary Education cannot be divorced from the country's philosophy of education. The whole process of education can be compared with the construction of a building -foundation, walls and roof. Although the word building is the same throughout the world, their types differ from country to country to provide solution to the existing problems. The building that is suitable in Nigeria may not be suitable in Canada because of weather and level of development. This is the same with education: As a building is constructed to solve human problems so education is concerned with human problems.

The foundation of the country's education before and since the introduction of the 6 - 3 - 3 -4 is the Primary Education. The rest of the education system is built upon primary education. For this reasons, the primary education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. This being the case, the goals of primary education are to:

- inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively ;
- lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society; mould the character and develop sound, altitude and morals in the child;
- Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of capacity;
- Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

The goals are quite relevant to the teaching of Environmental Education (EE) in Primary Schools in Nigeria. Since primary education is out to educate everybody.

The general goal of Environmental Education (EE) is to develop a citizen that is aware of the total environment, concerned about it and its knowledge, skills, attitude, motivations an commitment to work individually and collectively towards a solution of current problems and the prevention of the new ones. Therefore, teaching of Environmental Education (EE) in the Primary School is a necessity but is faced with several problems, which should be removed for better Environmental Education (EE) at the Primary School level.

Meaning of Environmental Education

Environmental Education (EE) was described as the outcome of a re-orientation and adaptation of the various disciplines and of the different educational experiences (natural sciences, social sciences, arts, engineering etc.) making it possible to achieve an integrated perception of the environment and to act towards it in a more rational way that corresponds to social needs.

There are various definitions for the concept "Environmental Education" globally and locally. At the international workshop on Environmental Education (EE) held in Belgrade in 1975,

Environmental Education (EE) is defined as "education aimed at developed a world population that is aware of, and concerned about the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively towards a solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones." Also the International Union for the Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCNR) defines Environmental Education (EE) as "the process of recognizing values and clarifying concept in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relation between man, his culture and his biophysical surrounding."

To Fafimwa (1990) Environmental Education (EE) is philosophy, which is interdisciplinary and holistic in approach. While it is necessarily local in outlook it also draws experiences from the rest of the world. According to Okebukola, P. A. (1993), Environmental Education (EE) is the process of acquiring or transmitting knowledge, attitude and skills for the sustainable use of nature and man-made resources.

To UNESCO (1986), Environmental Education (EE) is awareness of concern about and concern for the environment manifested through the acquisition and application of knowledge, attitude and skills. This valid and reliable concept of Environmental Education (EE) is the kind that is desired in the Nigeria Educational system.

In simple terms therefore, Environmental Education may be described as 'a process of learning and teaching knowledge and skills which enable us to understand and appreciate our surroundings and the interrelationship between us, our .culture and resources (Mutebi and Matovu, 1993).

According to Mansaraya and Ajiboye (1997), the main aims of Environmental Education (EE) have been identified as follows:

- to provide opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- to encourage people to examine and interpret the environment from a variety of perspectives - physical, geographical, biological, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual;
- to arouse people's awareness of and curiosity about the environment and encourage active participation in resolving environmental problems.

Rationale for Teaching Environmental Education (EE) in Primary Schools

Virtually all countries in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) display characteristics and challenges which the Environmental Education (EE) can and should effectively address among which the following are included: (1) Low level of economic development (2) High birth rates and low death rates with populations increase, ranging between 2.5 and 4% p.a. (3) A young population where more than 50% of the total population is below 15 years of age (4) Increasing urbanization with marked rural-urban drifts (5) The urban challenges\of solving the problems of congested living areas, inadequate shelter, under — employment, unemployment and the imprudent use of the available forms of energy.

These trends are increasingly felt and are actually slowing down planned development, by putting pressure in the natural resources.

The rapid population also has the effect of worsening current environmental problems such as:

1. Land degradation
2. Accelerated soil erosion
3. Desertification
4. Under-nutrition and malnutrition
5. Energy misuse and waste
6. Pollution and
7. Environmental disease.

Governments are therefore, trying to use education to promote good environmental practices. Due to its function as the paramount agent for development, it contributes directly individual satisfaction and know-how. It also prepares the individual physical, mentally and morally for a changing role in his community, nation, region and the world. These aspects of human development can be effectively

used to conserve and protect the environment. It is therefore, evident from the foregoing that Environmental Education (EE) has a key role to play in the social, economic and political development of our countries.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) emphasizes the need for education of the younger generation; it is well known that adults do not learn as easily as children, so they could learn how to protect and improve their environment. Indeed, U. S. Senator (Jay) Nelson in introducing the Environmental Education (EE) Bill in the congress recognized that the problems of checking environmental deterioration are largely a behavioural one. He stated, "Education, I believe, is the only proper way to influence values, attitudes and basic assumptions in a democratic society. Behavior, on the long run, can best be changed through the process of education". The educational system has understandably been looked upon as the viable channel for influencing the behaviour of future generations.

Therefore, various governments have adapted this simple definition in order to introduce Environmental Education (EE) in their respective countries as a tool for solving and attacking their diverse environmental problems and issues. In Nigeria, Environmental Education is being seen as an education from the environment, about the environment and for the environment (NCF 1991).

The environment has been so much abused by the human race that people are now becoming anxious of what will become of the world (living things) in the future. This has led to the awareness of the need to conserve the environment. In order to do this successfully, it is pertinent to educate everybody so that there will be a feeling of concern and commitment among the people of the world (NCF, 1993).

According to Okebukola (1991), curriculum theorists hold the view that the knowledge that is of most worth is that which is of some significance and relevance to the life of the learner. If survival in a desert is of priority to the children of Arabs in the Sahara desert, then a curriculum for such children of incorporating learning experienced in water conservation techniques will be of most worth.

Similarly, a curriculum for the children of nomads in Nigeria providing learning experiences in cattle rearing, fish, farming, vegetation types and fauna of Nigeria, the climate of Nigeria and survival skills in the forest, Savannah or creeks, will be of most worth. This expectation of the worthiness of a curriculum is to be stretched with regards to Environmental Education (EE).

Nigeria has in recent times been pursuing a vigorous programme of Environmental Education (EE), both in the formal education sectors. With respect to the formal education sector, it has been recognized that though the 1977 Nigeria Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981), indicates a national commitment to providing an education that would enable people to apply scientific knowledge to the solution of environmental problems and subsequently to the improvement of environment for the use and convenience of society, this commitment did not command national attention until the occurrence of certain major environmental hazards. Perhaps with the experience in mind, the National Council on Education (Nigeria's highest educational policy making body) will see the need for teaching Environmental Education (EE) right from foundation level.

Problems and Prospect of Teaching Environmental Educational (EE) in Primary Schools

One fundamental problem is that Environmental Education calls for new approaches, methods and contents, some or all of which may be resisted by the existing structure. This necessitates the need for the traditional structures of educational system to be made more flexible especially with reference to the characteristics of Environmental Education (EE). The 1981 revised National Policy on Education also specified, particularly in the Technical Education section, the aim "to provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man instead of Environmental Education (EE). The dearth of Environmental Education (EE) specialists, texts and teaching manuals, coupled with the congestion of the current school time-table was implicated as militating against Environmental Education (EE) implementation within the school system (NCF, 1993).

Many other obstacles to the development of Environmental Education (EE) include inadequacy of teaching and programme personnel, lack of teaching and learning materials, contending but challenging emerging ideas or forms of education in recent years such as AIDS education, sex education, environmental education, mass mobilization education and inadequacy of funds to execute

these forms of education (NCF, 1991).

With respect to the prospects of Environmental Education in Nigeria the level of awareness and action about the increase with government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) organizing various training workshops and seminars; NCF alone organized thirteen (13) in Lagos. This is to create awareness and intimate the teachers about the significance of Environmental Education (EE) in Nigeria Schools. The Federal Government's commitment to improved environmental actions both in formal and non-formal education sectors is further reflected in the following:

- i. involvement of the Presidency in tree-planting campaigns;
- ii. annual organization of workshops and seminars to mark the World Environmental Day.;
- iii. establishment of an Ecological fund for combating natural disasters;
- iv. establishment of national parks, forest reserves and wetland sanctuaries;
- v. pursuance of plans by 1CFNE in collaboration with NERDC to revise the national schools curriculum and infuse Environmental Education (EE) elements at the Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and Adult Education levels;
- vi. establishment of the National Coordinating Committee at (NERDC), with secretariat at NERDC (a parastatal of the FME and YD) to facilitate collaborative relationship among Environmental Education (EE) associations, citizens, groups, educational institutions, government and non-government including voluntary organizations (NCF, 1993).

Recommendations

It is clear that Environmental Education (EE) programme should provide opportunity for learners to become equipped with tools like values, attitudes, skill and knowledge (VASK) necessary for studying the relationship between man and his environment in order to identify his crucial problems of survival and proper solutions to them. Therefore, to catch them young, there is need for more emphasis on the teaching of Environmental Education (EE) in Nigeria Primary Schools.

The following recommendations, however, are suggested to serve as a guide for successful teaching of the concept in Primary Schools.

1. In order to have a clear understanding of environmental issues, the teaching/learning process should be restructured so as to accommodate 'new' approaches that enhances students knowledge of the environmental issues and to promote favourable attitudes on their parts towards the environment.
2. Teachers in the primary schools should be given on the job training through organized workshops, seminars and symposia where they would be exposed to all that is involved in the teaching of Environmental Education (EE). Also the materials and sufficient time in the timetable are highly required.
3. Due to the importance of Environmental Education (EE) to the society, it will be helpful if this aspect of our education is made a separate subject in which students can graduate like in other subjects such as Social Studies, Integrated Science, and so on. This will enhance the production of experts needed for the teaching Environmental Education (EE) in Nigeria Primary Schools.

Conclusion

The Nigeria child is an inseparable part of the Nigeria environment. The interaction of the two whether positively or negatively will either act as a solid foundation and pillar sustainable development in Nigeria, or lead to further degradation of the Nigerian environment (Gifford, Hays and Borors, 1982). A well-educated populace, in their view, is the best insurance for our environment. The need for effective and adequate environmental education at primary school level is based essentially on the following reasons:

1. Primary School pupils are the most sensitive group or are at the formative stage receptive and strongly motivated, and therefore, can be initiated, involved and for understanding and tackling the environment problems in Nigeria. Effective Environmental Education (EE) will be a way of ensuring that younger generations are well equipped with the knowledge, attitude and skills to tackle environmental problems. Since it may be easier to develop positive environmental attitudes among children from the onset rather than

change the negative attitude among adults.

2. The primary school level is the school age, which is regarded as the most impersonate age, when children tend to retain for long and subsequently build upon any meaning habit they, cultivate. Therefore, a familiarization of primary school pupils with the basic ' concepts, themes and skills for studying and resolving environmental question, issues and problems becomes imperative at this introductory level.

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