

A Study On College Students' Ecological Awareness :
In the context of Environmental Education.

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Abstract

In the present context of ecological crisis, there is a need of ecological awareness among all sections of people in the society. This paper aimed at studying the ecological awareness of the college students in the context of Environmental Education included in their course of study. 90 students, both boys and girls between the age group of 19-21 years participated in the study. Self-constructed Questionnaire was applied to collect required data. Students from both rural and urban areas showed satisfactory awareness towards ecological knowledge. The paper discussed measures to develop students' awareness towards ecological knowledge and crisis at college level through the subject Environmental Education.

Key Words: Ecological knowledge, ecological crisis, ecological awareness, environmental education.

Introduction:

In the present world, due to various reasons environmental degradation is taking place. This condition demands environmental preservation by the people of all sections of the society. The reasons like population explosion, global warming, deforestation, soil erosion, energy crisis, wildlife extinction, etc. have affected the sustainability of the whole eco-system. As a result, Environmental Education has become the much needed subject of the present education system.

Environmental Education aims at developing awareness and knowledge among people regarding their physical and social environment. The concept 'environment' covers both organisms and physical surroundings and their interactions. This interaction between individuals, organisms and their environment lead to the formation of 'ecological system' or 'eco-system'.

In general term, ecology is defined as a science which deals with the relationships between groups of living things and their environment. The term 'ecology' was originally coined by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) in the mid 19th century. An eco-system includes its abiotic constituents like minerals, climate, soil, water, sunlight, and all other nonliving elements, and its biotic constituents like all living members. In order to preserve the environment, an awareness among the college students about of the 'eco-system' is much needed. For this both students and teachers must have ecological knowledge. Ecological knowledge refers to the understanding by the people of their relationships to the earth and the universe, and the knowledge inherent within that relationships. This knowledge help them to cope with the problem of ecological crisis.

Ecological crisis is one of the burning issue in the present world. It is the condition of imbalance between the organisms and physical environment. Our country along with the whole world is facing different problems due to ecological crisis. The ecological imbalance have caused various environmental issues in India. The various problems faced by India in this regard are mainly population growth, air pollution, solid waste pollution, garbage wastage, noise pollution, soil erosion and pollution, deforestation, extinction of rare wildlife species etc. These are one of the main reasons for the various diseases, health issues in India. Although India has made progress in dealing with the environmental and ecological issues, still it has a long way to go. And in order to reach the goal, the student community have to come forward. The students must have ecological awareness so that they can step forward to protect the whole eco-system.

At present, the students of fourth semester (Arts, Science and Commerce) in degree course required to study Environmental Education as one of their compulsory subject. The syllabus includes the topics like natural resources, eco system, biodiversity and its conservation, social issues and environment, human population and environment etc. In context of this subject it is necessary to study the awareness of students regarding their eco-system, so that they can protect, preserve and conserve the same. Because, this approach can

help to take positive and effective steps towards the preservation and conservation of the whole environment.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the ecological awareness of college students of Sivasgar district .
- To study the role Environmental Education to develop students' ecological awareness
- To suggest measures to develop ecological awareness among students.

Definition of the key terms:

Ecological Awareness-

Awareness is considered as the ability of a person to feel or to be conscious of events, objects, etc. in this study, ecological awareness refers to the college students; concern regarding preservation of environment and natural resources or eco-system, so that they can be used sensibly.

Ecological Knowledge-

Here in this study, ecological knowledge refers to the understanding by the students of their relationships to the earth and the universe, and the inherent knowledge within that relationship. It refers to both traditional ecological knowledge and western ecological knowledge which includes the aspects like harvest studies, environmental knowledge, archaeological informations, biology, botany, zoology, geology, anthropology, psychology etc.

Delimitations of the study:

- The study is mainly confined to the three colleges of Sivsagar district –Gorgaon College, Sibsagar College and Sibsagar Commerce College
- The study is restricted to the degree students between the age group of 19-21 years only.
- **Area of the study :** The study was conducted in the three degree colleges (Gorgaon College, Sibsagar College and Sibsagar Commerce College) of Sivasagar district of Assam under Dibrugarh University. Sivasgar is a historical place situated in Upper Assam.

Methodology of the study:

Methods:

Descriptive method was used for this study.

Population:

The population of the study covers only the degree students of the colleges of Sivsagar district .

Selection of Sample:

For the study , total 90 students were selected out of which 45 were boys and 45 were girls. 15 boys students and 15 girls students were randomly selected from each of the three colleges included in the study. Both rural and urban students were included in the study.

Tools used :

A self-structured Questionnaire was used to collect data from students which included the questions on various topics like recycle, global warming, solar system, energy conservation, endangered species, organic products, etc.

Results and Discussions:

In this study it is found that girls' ecological awareness is higher than the boys. Girls showed positive response (66.7 %)towards ecological issues , while only 55.5% boys showed ecological awareness.

53 % of the students understood that each and every object in an eco-system is dependent on each other and the survival of the living organism is not possible in the absence of other. However, girl students were more aware of this dependency than the boys students. 62% of them (girls) said that there is dependency among the organisms of an eco system.

It is found in the study that the student's knowledge about ecology or eco-system is mostly theoretical. They lack practical knowledge in this regard. Their knowledge is only confined to the topics included in their syllabus. Most of the students study this subject in such a way so that they can just pass the examination.

Regarding the responsibility towards solving ecological crisis, 42.2 % boys said that it is the responsibility of the leaders, 28.8 % said that it is the administrators who should come forward to take the responsibility and 28.8 % boys admitted that it is their own responsibility to solve the ecological crisis.

On the other hand, 22.2% girls said that ecological crisis should be solved by the leaders and 24.4% of them think that is the responsibility of the administrators. Majority of the girl's students (53.3%) responded that they themselves should take the responsibility to solve ecological crisis.

Out of 90 respondent 77 respondents' i.e. 85.6 % were aware of the concept of global warming and the facts that can lead to it. They also opined that rise in the level of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere can be a threat to the whole eco-system. However, their knowledge is only bookish. 82 % of the respondents were aware of the concepts like solar energy, recycling, organic products, soil conservation, water pollution, pesticides, etc.

Majority of them (92%) mentioned that tree plantation can be adopted for soil conservation. 87 % of them are aware of the food chain of eco-system and how all the living organisms are dependent on each other for their survival.

Regarding the knowledge about local Abhaypur Reserve Forest, Pohu Gorh wet land, Pani Dihing Bird sanctuary, etc. in Sivsasar district only 47% of the students responded positively. Majority of them were unaware of these places in their own district. However, it was found that about 12 boys out of 45 were members of different nature clubs and joined various workshops and photowalks in the places mentioned above.

Majority of the students said that they lack ecologically oriented literature. They don't find the text book sufficient to understand the eco-system properly.

The results of the study showed that the topics included in the syllabus of Environmental education can play a strong role in developing awareness among students regarding their eco-system. However, it has to focus more on the practical knowledge of the subject.

Suggestions:

- Practical and projects related to eco-system and environment should be given to the students. Because, direct learning from nature is regarded as a powerful educational methodology.
- The subject Environmental education should be included in all stages of learning and in all educational institutions so that students can become more aware of their eco-system and environment.
- Various seminars, conferences, workshops, photo walk, etc. should be organized for college students so that they can actively participate in environmental works and solve ecological crisis.
- Teachers and college authority should come forward to develop ecological awareness among students by various programmes. Tree plantation programmes at various places etc. can be adopted by the college authority in order to solve problems like soil erosion, soil degradation, etc. Moreover, they should also be provided knowledge regarding local species of plants, birds, insects and other small animals by their teachers.
- Teachers should develop a positive mindset among students in order to develop the feeling of responsibility towards solving ecological crisis. They should provide various information of traditional harvesting methods, land use mapping, archaeology etc.
- More ecologically oriented literature on should be published so that students can gain proper knowledge regarding their eco-system.

Conclusion:

The protection of our environment is very important. In order to do this, we must have the understanding of the relationships between the earth, the universe and the human being. We must understand the inherent knowledge of this relationship. With the help of Environmental Education, we need to develop this understanding among students which will make them aware of their surroundings, the environment and the eco-system. All the people living in a society, including the students should work together for an eco-friendly world.

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