

Val II, Issue:VIII, Sept 2012

ISSN : 2230-7850

Indian Streams Research Journal

Impact Factor 0.2105



Monthly Multidisciplinary Research Journal



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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2230-7850

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Environmental Education at Schools & Colleges: Issues of curriculum and their status

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Abstract:

Compulsory Environmental Education is being taught in entire India since 2007-08 at university/ college level as per the Supreme Court directions. Honorable Supreme Court of India has directed to the Ministry of Human Resources, UGC and other educational institutions through its decision of Writ Petition No. 860 filed in 1991 from Non Governmental Organization to implement compulsory environmental education throughout the country. Various universities in India have implemented this course in respecting colleges through its notification.

Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj Nagpur University published notification on 27th February 2007 to implement the compulsory six month Environmental Studies syllabus for all the second year students at undergraduate level. The model syllabus made by UGC is uniform at all India level and divided into 8 units consisting classroom teaching as well as field work. Whole syllabus is to be covered in 50 classroom lecturers and project work. This syllabus is much relevant as present environmental conditions are very vulnerable and needs immediate interference by the society. This mandatory course will definitely sow seeds of conservation of nature in the minds of undergraduate students and will create environmentally responsible citizens of nation. But it is a fact that universities have miserably failed to implement this syllabus with proper mechanism. This paper is an effort to highlight the issues related with implementation of this syllabus in colleges with more environmental manner.

KEY WORD: Supreme Court verdict, Environmental studies syllabus, implementation issues

INTRODUCTION:

The verdict of Supreme Court of India has made mandatory to teach Environmental Education throughout India. The Writ Petition (civil) was filed by M C Mehta in the apex court in 1991 and judgment came on 18th Dec 2003 regarding this course. The petitioner has received Goldman Environmental Prize award which is considered as an alternative to Nobel in USA, for his continuous fights in Indian courts against pollution-causing industries. He further received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Asia for Public Service in 1997. In his Writ petition he requested to the apex court to direct the central as well as state governments to create environmental awareness among the students through the medium of education. Supreme Court of India has issued the direction on his petition on 18th December 2003 as "We accept on principle that through the medium of education awareness of the environment and its problems related to pollution should be taught

Please cite this Article as :Y Y Dudhapachare¹J A Sheikh², Environmental Education at Schools & Colleges: Issues of curriculum and their status : Indian Streams Research Journal (Sept. ; 2012)



as a compulsory subject. Learned Attorney General pointed out to us that the Central Government is associated with education at the higher levels and University Grants Commission can monitor only the under graduate and post graduate studies. The rest of it, according to him, is a state subject. He has agreed that the University Grants Commission will take appropriate steps immediately to give effect to what we have said, i.e. requiring the Universities to prescribe a course on environment. They would consider the feasibility of making this a compulsory subject at every level in college education. So far as education up to the college level is concerned, we would require every State Government and every Education Board connected with education up to the matriculation stage or even intermediate colleges to immediately take steps to enforce compulsory education on environment in a graded way. This should be done so that in the next academic year there would be compliance with this requirement” This direction clearly directs the central and state governments to develop mechanism to teach compulsory environment syllabus and make awareness about environment in the students. Thereafter CBSE and NCERT and various state education boards have made the curriculum to teach environmental studies syllabus at high school level while UGC has framed the syllabus for undergraduate and post graduate colleges. The syllabus is much important and will generate awareness, positive attitude and honor towards environment surrounding among the students but it requires proper implementation in the schools and colleges. This paper focuses on the present status of issues regarding implementation of this syllabus among the university colleges in India.

Environment Education: The concept of environment education emerged from the Stockholm Conference organized by the United Nation in 1972. Recommendations of the conference emphasized organization of 'formal' and 'mass' environmental education programs. The First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education was held in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1977. Thereafter in many countries environmental education introduced at basic level as well as at university colleges. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) outlined the concept of environment education in different publications in 1975, example, “Curricula for the Ten Year School: A Framework”. Thereafter Centre for Environment Education (CEE) was established in August 1984 as a Centre of Excellence supported by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India and in 1985 the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) programme was started by Ministry of Environment and Forest. NEAC has given more attention to environmental campaign in various parts of India. But all these efforts were deficit as compared to present EE (Environment Education) syllabus on various levels. National Green Corps started in the schools in 2004, it started various environmental awareness programmes in the schools and lastly this compulsory course on environmental has changed the entire scenario.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

1. Major objective of this study is to analyze the issues related with implementation of present environmental syllabus with more effective manner.
2. Objective of this study is to suggest new ways of implementation to environmental studies syllabus in schools and colleges.

MATERIAL AND METHOD:

For present study general observation and interviews with subject teachers about implementation of present syllabus in the colleges are carried out. Mostly the colleges were selected from Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj Nagpur University for observation along with the schools from Nagpur region. Interviews with the students from various colleges were carried out for the findings. Study material is taken from Environmental Studies book; various Governmental Regulations are referred to decide the administrative frame of mind about this curriculum.

SUCCESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:

The central as well as state governments have issued various government regulations regarding this compulsory course for implementation in the schools and colleges from the session 2007- 08. The environment books for the schools were printed in the year 2005 and 2006. Maharashtra state secondary and higher secondary education board has printed about 200000 books for the class IXth and 100000 books for Xth in 2006, books were circulated in the schools throughout the state. There was huge training programme for the school teachers in 2006-2007; author of this paper was also a resource person for many training programmes. The compulsory course of Environment implemented in the state of Maharashtra from the session 2007-08 for IXth standard and for class Xth 2008-09, the course for senior colleges was

implemented also from the session 2008-09. The schools and colleges are giving Grades on mark sheets of the students for this subject instead of actual marks as per Supreme Court guidelines. The course consists theory periods, field visit and environmental projects. This course is developing the environmental attitudes among the students and changing their behavior. This subject will help to make environmentally responsible students and this trend is displaying to some extent within three year of implementation. Subject matter of this course is also very important and designated with specific objectives. Many of the environmental rallies, environmental awareness programmes, water harvesting rallies, plants transplantation drives, solid waste collection, drive against plastic use, go to school on cycles, cycle clubs, proper use of electricity in schools and colleges, making use of wasted papers, river cleaning programmes, school cleaning and hygiene, establishment of nature club in schools, environmental study tours etc. are some examples which have been carried out by the schools and college students in this short time. Earlier all these programmes were organized by the schools; but recently there is a burst of awareness regarding environmental matter among the school students. All this change is directly related with the compulsory environmental course taught by the teacher in schools.

There were many environmental programmes organized in academic field in last three to four years; eco-friendly activities by the students as well as teachers, awards to the students and teacher by the Zillah Parishad and colleges, various workshops, seminars and conferences, college teacher's refresher courses in the various Academic Staff Colleges on the special theme of Environment are some examples which indicate the boom of activities in academic arena; which is a result of this compulsory environmental studies course introduced at various levels. But it can not be said that everything is achieved by implementation the syllabus and environmental teaching in the schools and colleges.

OBSERVATION ON CURRICULUM AND DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Environmental studies curriculum is designed in simple manner which may act as a catalyst for activating the college students; but it is seen that the curriculum is not being implemented with deep concern by the school and college authorities. After interacting with the students and teachers some deficiencies are found in the present teaching system which can be removed easily so as to make this syllabus more effective. The Issues are

1. There are no special subject teacher's appointments for Environmental Studies course.
2. Teachers who are not educated in environment related subject; are teaching the curriculum.
3. There were neither sufficient training programmes for the school and college teachers before implementation of this compulsory syllabus nor are they continuing today.
4. It is seen that the required periods are not shown in the time table, consequently the periods are not taking place in the colleges and if they are shown; they are displayed at the ending of college time; which is impracticable to conduct.
5. It is learnt from discussion with teachers that the Environmental Studies curriculum has a grade system instead of giving the marks; therefore this become a secondary subject and college authorities are not ready to sacrifice their prime time on time table for this subject. Instead of this they prepare for other main subjects.
6. This syllabus is in nature of classroom teaching along with field work but study tours and field works are not complete as per course requirement.
7. Projects which are submitted to the schools and colleges are not of appropriate standard and many of the projects are taken from web in copy paste manner.
8. State Governments are also not implementing this curriculum with deep concern; and are trying to escape from financial burden. Recently two decisions by the state of Maharashtra are taken. First is at school level through which government is thinking to close down this special subject and include this subject matter in other related science subject, and introduce ICT (Internet Communication Technology) instead of Environmental Studies.
9. At University level; the state government has taken the decision to introduce E-learning regarding teaching this subject instead of classroom teaching. The state government has published GR regarding this whole teaching process. Introduction of this GR clearly marks that the UGC has made mandatory this subject at University/Colleges but has not Okayed the new teacher's appointments as well as the financial grant; so far the state government is introducing Environmental Studies with E-learning method.

All these observations regarding compulsory environmental course at state boards as well as at university education indicate that the required yielding of this syllabus could not achieved and there is much scope to bring reforms in the implementation system to this curriculum. It is much important to execute this curriculum with deep concern. Some newspaper have written articles that the 'Environmental

Projects' themselves are hampering the environment' as they are prepared with copy-paste manner. These type of criticize will become a mass reality if the projects could not make an awareness among the students. So far, following suggestions are being recommended.

SUGGESTION AND RECOMMENDATION:

1. There should be appointments of the qualified teacher throughout the country at high school and university level for this course.
2. Regular training programmes should be organized for all the school and college teachers regarding changes in the syllabi.
3. As this is mandatory syllabus, it should be treated in the middle of the time table of everyday and not at ending; as for the college teaching is concern.
4. Instead of grade; absolute marks should be awarded to the student on his performance in all environment activities as well as in written papers.
5. Financial Burden of field work and study tour of the students should be shared by the government.
6. It should be permitted the students to visit fields, to polluted industries and understand its manufacturing process.
7. Study tours should be permitted to National Parks, Reserve Forests, Sanctuaries and Protected Forests to understand the bio-diversity, food chain etc. It should not be considered as tourism in the National Parks.
8. Universities and colleges along with the schools should monitor with appropriate system if they are implementing the syllabus as well as its principles there selves.
9. Green teacher awards, green student's award, green school etc should be initiated at various levels.

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