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Knowledge of the Municipal School Children Regarding Environmental Condition and Enhancing the Same through Educational Programme



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Abstract

World is facing serious problem of environmental degradation, population explosion, increase in depletion of physical resources, environmental pollution and technological growth. These are the factors resulting in an unprecedented deterioration of our environment. The truth is that the life of future generations of this planet in the next century is in real danger and the danger might come earlier if something is not done on a global scale. The most burning problem today is of climate change. Whichever way environmental degradation is categorized it is glaring that the most environmental damage is the resultant effect of environmental problems. Environmental awareness needs to be created through formal and informal education to all sections of the society. Everyone needs to understand it become 'environment belongs to all and every individual matters when it comes to conservation and protection of environment. Environmental education must be imparted to the student right from the childhood stage. Children who are the future of the country should have knowledge about the present environmental condition as in many developing countries they comprise nearly half of the population. Taking all this into consideration a study was conducted on assessing the knowledge of Municipal School Children regarding environmental conditions. Once the knowledge was assessed an educational programme was developed for enhancing their knowledge and awareness regarding environmental condition and their role in environmental protection. The results of the study showed their low level of knowledge and therefore a need was felt to give them knowledge about the issues such as ozone layer, harmful effects of global warming, role of individuals in reducing the global warming and help save the environment. They were made to understand that even a small contribution on each children's part will lead towards the sustainable development which is about finding better ways of doing things, both for the future and the present.

Keywords: Knowledge, Environmental Condition, Educational Programme, School Children.

Introduction

Increasing population, basic human needs and consumeristic life styles and large-scale industrialization are regarded as the major culprits contributing to the gradual environmental degradation of our 'spaceship' called Earth (Das and Behera, 2008) Nature has started showing its revenge for the abuse which we human beings have done on it. We all are witnessing the drastic changes in our environment in the previous years. Rise in temperature, increase in rainfalls, earth quakes, droughts and destruction after tsunamis are becoming a part of our daily news headlines which is alarming for the forthcoming disaster. During the present century, the environment has undergone a revolution. World is facing serious problem of environmental degradation, population explosion, increase in depletion of physical resources, environmental pollution and technological growth. These are the factors resulting in an unprecedented deterioration of our environment. The truth is that the life of future generations of this planet in the next century is in real danger and the danger might come earlier if something is not done on a global scale (Chaman Preet Kaur, 2008). Its deterioration has come about mainly as a result of human activities especially those concerned with industrialization, unrestrained

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growth of human population and the mismanagement of the world's environment. The environment and its conditions is the major and burning problem of not only a single state or a single country, but for the entire world (William, 2006)

Environment has its own limit as well as capacities to disperse, degrade, absorb or otherwise dispose off unwanted waste in the natural sinks of the atmosphere. As the population expanded, urbanization and industrialization increased, resulting in large amount of waste, of all kinds, ever increasing beyond the nature's capacity presents a daunting and serious problem. The most burning problem today is of climate change. Whichever way environmental degradation is categorized it is glaring that the most environmental damage is the resultant effect of environmental problems. Public awareness about environmental conditions is needed. Of late, some awareness has taken place related to environmental degradation, pollution etc. but incomplete knowledge and information and ignorance about many aspects has often led to misconceptions. Environmental awareness needs to be created through formal and informal education to all sections of the society. Everyone needs to understand it because 'environment belongs to all and every individual matters when it comes to conservation and protection of environment. Environmental education must be imparted to the student right from the childhood stage. It is a welcome step that now all over the country we are introducing environmental studies as a subject at all stages including school and college level, following the directives of the supreme Court (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2008). Children who are the future of the country should have knowledge about the present environmental condition as in many developing countries they comprise nearly half of the population. Furthermore, children in both developing and industrialized countries are highly vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation. The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of the crisis of mind and spirit. "It all depends on how do we think and act if we think". Man is all powerful and the supreme creature on this earth and man is the master of nature and can harness it at his will, it reflects our human centric thinking. On the other hand, if we think "Nature has provided us with all the resources for leading a beautiful life and she nourishes us like a mother, we should respect her and nurture her", this is an earth centric thinking. The first view urges us to march ahead gloriously to conquer the nature and establish our supremacy over nature through technological innovations, economic growth and development without much botheration to care for the damage done to the planet earth. The second view urges us to live on this earth as a part of it like any other creation of nature and live sustainably. So, we can see that our acts will follow what we think. If we want to check the environmental crisis, we will have to transform our thinking and attitude. That in turn, would transform our deeds, leading to a better environment and better future. (Kaushik and Kaushik, 2008).

Carl Sagan, the great astrologer, has pointed out that "we are the first species that has devised the means for its own self destruction"

Taking all this into consideration a study was conducted on assessing the knowledge of Municipal School Children regarding environmental conditions. Once the knowledge was assessed an educational programme was developed for enhancing their knowledge and awareness regarding environmental condition and their role in environmental protection.

Objectives

1. To assess the knowledge of Municipal School Children regarding environmental conditions
2. To develop an educational programme for enhancing the knowledge and awareness of Municipal School Children regarding environmental condition and their role in environmental protection.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was used for the present study. The sample of the study comprised of 120 children studying in IV and Vth standard selected through systematic random sampling technique from selected Municipal school of Baroda City. Interview schedule consisted of background information section and knowledge scale for assessing the knowledge of the children regarding environmental condition. Descriptive analysis as frequency, percentages and mean were used for data analysis.

Major Findings

The findings of the present study are as follows:

1. Background Information: The majority of the children studying in IV and Vth standard were boys. The mean age was 9.5 years. The children had to study in Municipal school as the income of the family was meager. The mother and father of majority were employed in jobs such as peon, maid, gardeners, drivers etc. The mean family income was Rs. 1047.00.
2. Knowledge regarding environmental condition: This section consisted of 36 statements reflecting the present condition of environment. The knowledge scale contained three categories of responses namely agree, undecided and disagree. All the statements were assigned scores 3 through 1. The scores were summated. The possible range of scores was divided into three categories having almost equal interval of number as below".

Table: 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Children According to Scores, Obtained for the Knowledge Regarding Environmental Condition

Scores for Knowledge	Range of scores	Respondents (Children) n=120	
		f	%
Low score (Poor)	12-20	43	35.8
Moderate Score (Neutral)	21-28	76	63.3
High score (Good)	29-36	-	-
Total		120	100
Mean		23.9	

It was revealed that none of the children scored high on knowledge scale, 63.3 percent of them had moderate score which reflected their knowledge as neutral towards environmental condition and 35.8 percent of the children had belonged to the low score category which showed that their knowledge was poor.

A probe into the knowledge revealed that the children were aware that the temperature of the earth was rising and carbon dioxide was the main reason for green house effect but lacked in issues like global warming, acid rain, ozone layer depletion, use of ecofriendly goods etc. They were not clear about the action to be taken to reduce global warming and pollution. A need was felt to give them knowledge about the issues such as ozone layer, harmful effects of global warming, role of individuals in reducing the global warming and help save the environment.

Educational Programme

The children were explained about the meaning of sustainable development which is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts. We are already seeing the damage this kind of approach can cause by changes in global climate resulting from our dependence on fossil fuel based energy sources. The longer we pursue unsustainable development the more frequent and severe its consequences are likely to become, which is why we need to take action now. (<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html>dat19.9.2011).

The children were explained about the ill effects of pollution, global warming, acid rain etc, causes, consequences and actions required on their part through posters and question answer sessions. An informal discussion on environment was done with the children which proved to be a very effective means of imparting knowledge about environmental conditions and ways to improve our environment. The children understood the concept of living within our environmental limits as one of the central principles of sustainable development. The children were taught about contributing in the good cause of saving mother earth from further deterioration and were suggested ways such as encouraging their parents and family members to switch to walking or cycling for short journeys instead of using vehicles, using public transport rather than using personal vehicles, throwing plastic bags in dustbin and not littering

around, developing kitchen garden even if small space is available around the house or planting in pot, encouraging people to grow more trees and sustain the trees, using more of solar energy which is cost effective as well as environment friendly, promoting the use of eco friendly products and switching off the lights and fans when not needed etc. They were made to understand that even a small contribution on each child's part will lead towards the sustainable development which is about finding better ways of doing things, both for the future and the present.

Conclusion

First and foremost we all as a responsible citizen of our country should respect our environment and take steps for decreasing the environmental degradation. As Mahatma Gandhi had once told "if you cannot change yourself, how can you change the world". Indeed all of us have to get united and realize our responsibility of making efforts towards sustainable development. The present study was aimed at making the school children aware about the environmental conditions, the effects, causes and consequences of pollution, global warming, green house, gases, etc. and the role they can play in sustainable development. It is the need of an hour to indulge in such efforts of community participation and mass education in which specific categories such as homemakers, college students; different income group people etc. can be motivated to protect the environment. This can be done by using different folk media, audio visual aids, street plays, drama etc. We all need a holistic, global, future oriented, equitable environment friendly and resourceful outlook for our future generations to sustain.

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