

Research Paper

Teachers' Perspectives on Integrating Environmental and Climate Change Education; Fostering Sustainability among School Students

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ABSTRACT

We as a human race are standing on a cliff point, where if the balance is not maintained one might fall on the other side, which has its repercussions, a comparable situation has been getting warm for decades against mother nature. This paper deals with teachers' opinions on teaching EE for developing sustainability among school students because teachers are the medium through which the content is delivered and they are the facilitators for the students, it is important to know and analyze their opinion towards teaching and their challenges, current scenario of the schools, the importance of Environmental Education and Climate Change, its impact, their teaching, initiatives towards mitigation and opportunities etc. A questionnaire considering open and close-ended questions was prepared and administered to the teachers. It was ascertained that teachers face challenges while teaching EE and CCE at the middle stage in English medium schools and do think that teaching EE and CCE is very important to teach. There is a need for training, resources, specific publications, infrastructure and support from schools and parents as well.

Keywords: *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Environmental Education (EE), Climate Change (CC), School Students, Survey*

By 2050, the number of people will rise from 6.7 to 9.7 billion. Throughout its 4.5-billion-year existence, Earth has experienced numerous icehouse–greenage cycles, and there is convincing evidence that human activities have accelerated the global warming trend since the Industrial Revolution. Future major changes that we can anticipate include rising sea levels, more frequent and severe storms, droughts, and hotter temperatures. Humans are only one species among many that inhabit the earth, and nature does not distinguish between them. We will all be impacted by global change, even though certain parts of the world will experience these effects more than others. Apart from the inevitable challenges of climate change, the harm to the environment due to human activities is very crucial. All levels, including society and government, must ensure the protection of the environment, especially in the case of environmental issues. The loss of traditional knowledge, social values, human behavior, and ethics is responsible for the environmental issues that are being faced by people today. Pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) are

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important in the preservation and protection of nature and its inherent value. Hence, activity, education, and advocacy are the keys to solving the environmental issues. are the components of the learning part of environmental education.

The goals for environmental education are lofty, but all are aimed at cultivating human environmental awareness and sensitivity, environmental knowledge, values and attitudes, and experience (Fang et al., 2023). EE teaches people to understand different facets of environmental issues so they may make responsible decisions and act. An interdisciplinary process called environmental education, or EE, gives people the information, attitudes, abilities, and drive they need to contribute to the solution of environmental problems. EE does not advocate a specific opinion, procedure, or practice (Basar, 2022). In the current scenario, Environmental Education and climate change are needed for an hour to develop sustainability among school students. NCF-SE 2023 also have EE as one of its thrust areas upon which the policymakers have focused and included it at every level of learning in the curriculum. There have been very less discussions about climate change education and the importance of including it in classroom teaching. Therefore, this paper focuses on teachers' opinions on teaching environmental education and climate change for developing sustainability among school students. India is an active member of the UN's, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are to be achieved by 2030. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is one of the key indicators to promote the development of sustainability and achieve SDGs as well. As a researcher of Education, I do feel the need to promote environmental education and climate change education from the beginning of the schooling journey of an individual through a strong curriculum and providing enough resources to the teacher for teaching and developing sustainability among students. As a student of this Indian education system, the researcher feels the gap between a student and nature. Human beings and mother nature are interconnected and share a great bond. Human beings are dependent on nature for various natural resources, food, climate etc. Without nature, humans cannot progress. But now what we as humans are lacking is nature, our bond which we left behind and want progress at the cost of Earth. Therefore, as a researcher in social sciences, feel the need to teach EE and CCE from an early age which can instruct students, make them aware, and understand, and provide values and attitudes for taking appropriate decisions and action regarding the environment. The teachers of England also share their views on the action-based CCE curriculum approach which includes global social justice, mitigations in primary schools such as conservation drives, local tree planting projects and parents' advocacy (Howard-Jones, 2021). Therefore, it is very much necessary to take the opinions of teachers and understand where we are lacking in providing education for the key issues that we humans are facing. Providing education and making them aware since childhood is the best way to make everyone aware and sensitize the issue and take the steps towards its mitigation. For mitigation, one needs to develop such attitude and decision-making abilities regarding it which promote sustainability and a green future. So, this research paper aims to work at the base level, teachers. Why? Because teachers are the first reformers of society, they have great power to transform a child's personality and enlighten them towards a positive direction in their lives. Therefore, what are the teachers' opinions towards EE and CCE at school are necessary to know and examine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ansari (2019) conducted a study titled "Development and evaluation of sustainability competencies toolkit" at Faridabad. 300 undergraduate students were taken as the sample for a survey, 80 students for studying the effectiveness of the sustainable competencies' toolkit

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and 5 experts as well. Tools used were a rating scale, opinionnaire, sustainability competency inventory and sustainability competencies toolkit. The quantitative methodology was used under which survey and experimental methods were taken.

Bhatia (2020) conducted a study titled "Environmental Education in India: Analysis of national curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches" This study examines the position of SDGs within the Indian environmental education curriculum and effective pedagogical approaches that enhance understanding in young minds and help enable them to follow and adopt the path of sustainable development. The two-stage evaluation process for this study includes document analysis and a critical literature review. From the study's conclusions, it is evident that though EE includes concepts to teach children about various aspects of multiple SDGs at the elementary school level, some of them have not been sufficiently addressed. The curriculum needs to be more effective in incorporating the concept of sustainable development. From the study's findings based on its analysis of the curriculum, it is evident that the Indian school curriculum needs to be more effective in teaching children about climate action. In all Indian schools, EE currently utilizes more theoretical approaches than practical approaches. It is thus essential to provide children with more opportunities for practical experiences.

Bhushan (2018) has out a study at the elementary school level titled "Reorienting social-science curriculum for sustainable development and studying its effectiveness." 70 eighth-grade students, five instructors, and five experts participated in the data gathering process, which used a mixed methodology separated into three phases and techniques like content analysis, rating scales, opinionnaires, observations, interviews, and sustainable development competency tests. The 2005–2014 period was declared the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development by the UN General Assembly. When the concept of sustainable development is not supported in the curriculum, what part do educators play in ensuring that students can make environmentally responsible decisions? Four middle school and high school teachers who participated in this qualitative study were interviewed; all of them tried to apply the idea of sustainable development in the classroom. Motivations, teaching style, instructors' impressions of the impact on students' learning, modeling, spirituality, and difficulties in teaching sustainable development were the six themes that emerged (Jasper, 2008).

Jetly and Singh (2019) conducted a study titled "Analytical study on perspectives of teacher educators of India concerning Education for Sustainable Development" The research paper aimed at understanding the prevailing perception of ESD amongst the teacher educators of India. The subjective opinions of teacher educators in the Chandigarh region who instruct graduate and postgraduate courses in teacher education programs of India were thoroughly analyzed using a qualitative deductive content analysis approach. In the study, a codebook, which is based on the UNESCO program "Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future" (TLSF), has been created. The conclusions of the study indicated the extent to which the larger categories of values, abilities, and knowledge addressed the ESD indicators, to attain a sustainable future, the study contributes to the general debate on reorienting programs for teacher education, especially when it comes to cultural sustainability.

Mishra (2019) conducted a study titled "A study of elementary teacher education curriculum in the light of education for sustainable development" in the Ajmer and Jaipur districts of Rajasthan. A mixed methodology design was chosen, under which survey method was

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selected by the researcher and used questionnaire, content analysis, classroom observation schedule, interview schedule as the tools to collect the data. The sample was 120 elementary teacher educators, (2 educationists, 2 environmentalists, 2 secondary teacher educators), 6 samples were for the interview schedule. The study's conclusions demonstrated a discrepancy between the prescribed curriculum and the executing curriculum. Those activities which are mentioned in the curriculum are not applying practically due to the inactiveness of teacher educators, Principals and lack of resources, unavailability of trained staff, irresponsible attitude of students etc.

Nag (2022) conducted a study titled “Sustainable lifestyle practices in teacher education programme” at Calcutta. The study was a mixed method design and data was collected through semi-structured interviews (self-made), Knowledge towards Environment Sustainability (KES) scale, Attitude towards Environment Sustainability (AES) scale, and Practice of Sustainable Behavior (PSB) scale as the tools. The findings showed that something is going wrong in the field of Teacher Education Programmes regarding sustainable lifestyle practices. This initiates the urge to go for a change in the present day two years B.Ed. curriculum. Awareness and consciousness are lacking among teacher educators and trainee teachers. So, knowledge, pro-environmental attitudes and sustainable lifestyle practices should be developed among them through teacher education programmes. The teacher education curriculum should be re-designed and modified.

Sahoo (2022) conducted a study titled “Effectiveness of a learning package on sustainable development for elementary school students in developing sustainable competency” at Kendrapara, Odisha. The research was conducted on class 8th students. It was quantitative research (quasi-experimental design). The study's conclusions showed that, in comparison to the conventional teaching approach, the Sustainable Development Learning Package (SDLP) significantly affects students' sustainable competencies. When compared to standard teaching methods, the Sustainable Development Learning Package (SDLP) significantly influences students' attitudes toward sustainable development.

Sulaiman, M. (2019) conducted a study under the title “Education for Sustainable Development” where the author discussed thrust areas, meaning and definition, need for ESD, role and emergence of ESD and author also discussed seven strategies for ESD as well. A study titled “Lifestyle Attitude Towards Sustainability and the Pedagogical Response of Pupil Teachers towards Sustainable Development Goals” in Dehradun and Pauri Garhwal districts of Uttarakhand. 300 pupil teachers (B.Ed.) for attitude, 32 pupil teachers for the pedagogical response, and only 6 SDGs taken for pedagogical response. Quality education and Gender equality were observed in the classroom and the other 4 SDGs in interaction sessions in the classroom and focused group discussions.

Objective

To study the opinions of middle-stage school teachers for teaching EE and CCE to develop sustainability among school students.

RESEARCH METHOD

We designed a survey for the teachers, which had 40 questions (33 close-ended and 7 open-ended). The tool was constructed considering three major components- current scenarios, importance, and teaching in the context of EE and CCE. The tool was validated by some experts and necessary changes were made. The last version was prepared after implementing

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the suggestions and changes, which had 40 questions (1-33 were close ended, yes/no type questions and 34-40 were open-ended questions).

Participants

The population for the study was English medium Middle stage schoolteachers of Gandhinagar city. Specifically, Social Science and Science teachers because at the Middle stage, EE is included in these two subjects and taught to the students along with these subjects in the classroom. The total number of English medium schools in Gandhinagar city is 22, therefore the researchers decided to collect the data from the entire population which is approachable and small as well. So, the population itself was the sample here and the researchers contacted the schools.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure included contacting the schools through e-mails and visiting the schools for permission from the principals of the schools along with a forwarding letter given by the researcher for their cooperation and support while collecting the data for the study.

The schools which permitted the data collection were 10 out of 22 English medium schools in Gandhinagar city, the below-mentioned schools permitted the data collection to the researchers along with the data collection dates. The data collected by the researcher is primary.

Sr. No.	Name of the School	Data collected on
1	Aradhna Vidhya Vihar School	28-12-2023
2	Dev International School	28-12-2023
3	New Life International School	02-01-2024
4	Shree Swaminarayan Public School	02-01-2024
5	Kameshwar International School	02-01-2024
6	S. V. English Medium Primary School	03-01-2024
7	Radiant School of Science	03-01-2024
8	St. Xavier's High School	04-01-2024
9	S. G. Patel English Medium School	04-01-2024
10	Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 01	04-01-2024

Data Analysis

The data was analysed in two parts,

For close-ended questions data (yes/no), it was statement-wise analysed by calculating the percentage of yes-respondents and no-respondents for each statement and projecting them in the form of a bar graph for a simpler understanding of the readers along with a percentage table for each statement.

For open-ended questions data, it was analysed through frequency analysis of answers received by the respondents. Raw data was entered in an Excel file and sorted properly according to the responses received and later analysed for its percentage value for each statement.

RESULTS

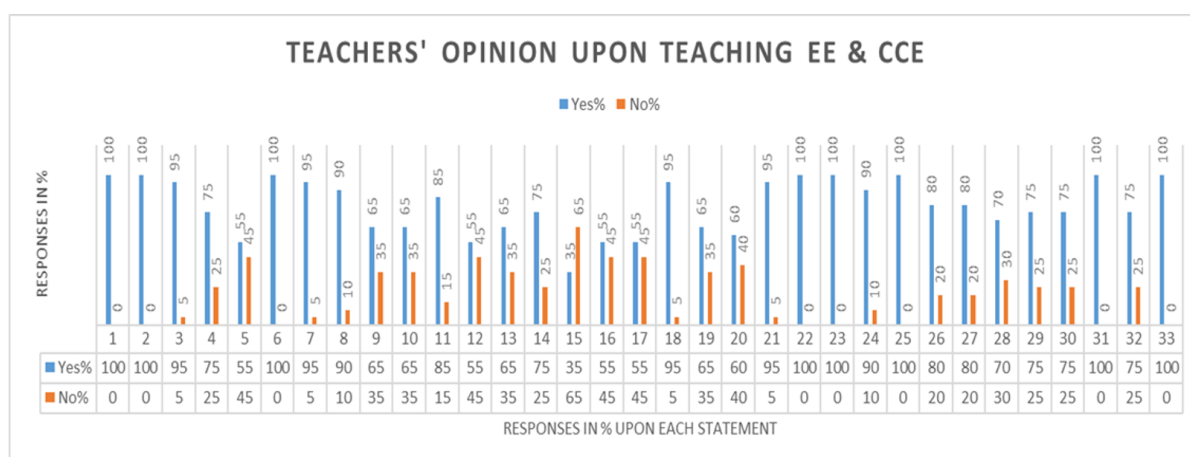
Out of 22 English Medium schools in Gandhinagar, irrespective of the type of school (Private, Government or Grand-in-aid) only 10 schools agreed to provide permission to collect the data from their schools and in each school 2 teachers (Social Science and Science) filled the questionnaire. Thus, only 45.45% of schools participated in the research. In the survey questionnaire, a total of 20 teachers participated. Out of which 90% of schools were private and 10% schools were government. There were 80% female teachers, and 20% male teachers were there. The maximum age of respondents was 56 years, and the minimum age was 24 years, which has an average of 36.9 years out of all the 20 respondents. 50% of the teachers were from CBSE and 50% from Gujarat Board.

According to the data received as shown in the below bar graph (Graph 1), the following can be determined and studied about EE and CCE,

- 100% of teachers think that teaching EE and CCE is important.
- 95% of teachers think EE is important in a school curriculum.
- 75% of teachers think that CCE is well-focused in the school curriculum, but 25% of teachers feel that CCE is not well-focused.
- 55% of teachers think that there are gaps in the curriculum with regards to the EE & CCE.
- 100% of teachers think that CCE should be included more in the school curriculum at the middle stage (6th to 8th standard).
- 65% of teachers feel the need for special training for teaching EE and CCE.
- 85% of teachers think that through education they can teach sustainability more quickly.
- 55% of teachers face challenges while teaching EE and 65% of teachers face challenges while teaching CCE.
- Only 25% of teachers have attended training for teaching EE and 75% of teachers do not have any training for teaching EE.
- 65% of teachers do not have attended any training for teaching CCE.
- 45% of teachers feel that there is no ample number of workshops/trainings with regards to EE and CCE.
- 95% of teachers depend on using resources/materials for teaching EE and CCE.
- 95% of teachers use TLMs as additional support for teaching EE and CCE.
- 100% of teachers think that using TLMs enhances teaching-learning about EE and CCE.
- 90% of teachers discuss current environmental updates and news with the students in their classes.
- 100% say that they receive support from the school management regarding teaching EE and CCE.
- 80% of teachers think that the parents are supportive enough to let their child invest time and energy into learning EE and CCE, but 20% of teachers think that the parents are not supportive enough.
- 80% of teachers think that the government is doing enough to promote EE and 70% of teachers think that the government is doing enough to promote CCE.
- 75% of teachers feel the need for specific publications regarding EE and CCE for the school.
- 75% of teachers think that there should be a special subject such as EE and CCE, it should not be infused with any other subject. As a special subject, it can create a greater impact on learners.

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- 100% of teachers think that technology helps teach EE and CCE. Out of which 75% of teachers only use technology while teaching EE and CCE.
- 100% of teachers think that there will be a change in students' attitudes and behaviours towards the environment after teaching EE and CCE.



Graph 1: Teachers' opinion for each question regarding teaching EE and CCE.

The goal of EE is to foster a connection with nature and provide a sense of interdependency with each other. How humans rely upon natural resources, ecological laws and principles, mother nature, society, and environmental issues and how to act against it. The research also tried to study how these schools teach EE to their students. 4.5% of schools teach EE as a separate school subject, 36.4% of schools teach EE through extra-curricular activities, 4.5% of schools teach EE by arranging special classes for it, 29.6% of schools teach EE by giving projects upon it and 25% of schools teach EE by outdoor visits and sessions.

36.6% of teachers have heard about the Towards a Green School resource book by NCERT. 56.6% of teachers have heard about the Environmental Education NCERT syllabus for 1 to 12 classes as per NCF 2005, NCERT. 0% of teachers had heard about any of the publications by the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE). 6.6% of teachers have only heard about the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) sourcebook by UNESCO.

According to the data, challenges faced by the teachers in India when it comes to teaching EE/CCE are lack of proper knowledge, resources, dedicated classrooms for EE/CCE, inadequate infrastructure, parental support and time limits in the classroom and overpopulated classrooms. The teachers suggested some of the concepts to be included in training/workshop on EE/CCE are an introduction to EE and CCE, ecosystem, which are the most needed resources and materials, mitigation, and actions to be taken as a teacher, how to implement in the locality, waste and environment management, present climate crisis. The teachers also listed some of the reasons that could prove to be a hindrance/limitation for teachers in adopting EE/CCE themes in their teaching, such as lack of support from parents, school management regarding teaching extra topics, time constraints in the classroom, lack of training and effective communication skills, no specific publication for each standard along with practical approach and activities which grab students' interest. The teachers were asked about which publication they rely upon the most for teaching EE/CCE, and they responded with the majority of answers such as NCERT and online videos and resources available. As a teacher, all the respondents felt the urgent need to teach EE and CCE

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considering the current environmental scenario and climate crisis because students should develop a sense of responsibility for preserving the environment and there is a need to make future leaders aware and understand to develop future based action approach for achieving sustainability. The teachers use various methods/practices to teach EE and CCE such as projects, drama, learning by doing, model making (data displaying), field visits, guest lectures, developing nature clubs, taking on nature walks, science experiments, debate upon current environmental issues and climate crisis. The teachers also provided a list of topics that should be included under EE and CCE such as climate crisis, future climate probabilities, change in natural resources and their conservation at the local level, sustainable living and teaching it to students at their level, eco-consciousness, developing eco-friendly attitudes and behaviors, carbon-emissions, and its level of impact.

DISCUSSION

The responses from the survey provide rich information regarding the gender diversity in educational environments from the perspective of educators as well as students. The main aim of this study was to determine gender diversity in the educational environment, and the results revealed that to create a gender-neutral educational environment, educators need professional training in sexuality education.

The results of this study emphasize the importance of how educator awareness can impact the well-being of minority students. From the perspective of educators, even though they are trying their uttermost best to treat every student equally, their lack of training in sexuality education hinders their ability to create a gender-neutral educational environment. A study by Brown & Gortmaker (2009) reported that, along with educators' efforts, proper training related to sexuality education is needed.

The results revealed that many of the educators stated that they faced some difficulties while addressing gender-diverse students. This is the result of not having enough awareness of gender diversity. One of the participants stated that "peer pressure is the major challenge that discourages students from having different gender orientations according to society standards" can be a stressor for nonbinary students. Educators can play a vital role in addressing this issue, as they can teach students about gender diversity and how having different orientations is natural. Stargell et al. (2020) suggested that educators can help in reshaping the educational environment, which can result in a more gender friendly or less gender-biased environment.

Furthermore, the results of these studies suggest that the use of gender-neutral pronouns can be a step toward a gender-neutral educational environment. It was observed that students react positively when someone uses gender-neutral terms such as them, they and their own terms instead of his or her own terms. However, it was also observed that students react differently when their educators support the gender identity of the students. Jeanes et al. (2012), in one of their books, mentioned that practicing gender neutrality along with gender-neutral pronouns can be beneficial for diverse gender groups, as it can create a sense of neutrality. The results show that even though the maximum numbers of the students' responses were neutral, there was still a hint of mixed feelings. For example, one of the students stated that "Cannot truly relate, cuz I myself do not need such gender identity support.", "feels cringe and annoyed sometimes depending on the way they say." This statement shows that if educators are trained professionally about this matter, then it will be

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beneficial for everyone, since they will have a clear idea about when or how to provide support.

To summarize, most of the responses were neutral, which shows that there is very little awareness of gender diversity. Educators require sexuality training so that they can address the issues faced by minority students. Additionally, if educators are well trained, they will be able to create a gender-neutral educational environment.

CONCLUSION

The current study clearly shows that there is still a lot of work needed to be done in Environmental Education (EE) and Climate Change Education (CCE) at middle-stage schools. All the teacher respondents feel the importance of EE and CCE in the school curriculum. Teachers do feel that CCE is still very less focused on the curriculum, especially at the middle stage (6th to 8th grade). More than half of the teachers feel the lack of proper training for teaching EE and CCE, they do face several challenges while teaching EE and CCE in the classrooms such as lack of proper resources, infrastructure, publications, parental support, time constraints etc. Teachers also suggested that keeping EE and CCE as separate subjects is a current need as per the current scenario of society rather than infusing it with other subjects. This will help in spreading awareness in the society about EE and CCE, it will develop an attitude and behaviour of the students towards the environment which will result in making sound and sustainable decisions towards environmental issues in the society. For that, the teachers should be provided with needed resources and specific publications for teaching EE and CCE to the students at every stage of the teaching-learning process. If the policy makers think towards making EE and CCE separate subjects or additional mandatory courses such as music, dance, pottery and sports in the school at the middle stage that might change the attitudes and behaviours of each child which will benefit decision making while facing such environmental issues in our everyday life and one can move towards achieving and contributing towards sustainability at their level. Developing more specific standard publications is one of the current needs which can also be available in local languages and maintaining uniformity is also required.

This study also explored that, teachers at English medium schools at the middle stage in Gandhinagar did not know about the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) which is completely dedicated to EE and works related to it. Therefore, somewhere it is necessary to spread awareness among the teachers as well regarding the special centres which are designed to work for such particular purpose. Providing them with training on how to teach such sensitive and current issues to the students studying at various stages will bring a change in this area and improve the understanding of the students and teachers as well. With this, the field of education can also contribute towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Which have dedicated indicators for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Therefore, it is necessary to provide education for sustainable development at each stage of development for the child at school.

Future Implications

More focus should be given to EE as a subject as currently it is infused with the other subjects. Similarly, CCE is also very less focused, which is the need of the hour right now. Humans do celebrate 5th June as World Environment Day but actually humans are currently living at the edge where every day should be celebrated as an environment day, and everyone should dedicate themselves towards taking care of our environment and going

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green. Therefore, the first step should be spreading awareness and educating children and people around us about EE and CCE and developing an attitude, values and skills for sustainability.

Here are some suggestions for policymakers about EE and CCE in middle-stage school education. As a researcher, I have observed there are separate classrooms for language, sports, laboratories, arts, pottery, music, dance etc. There should be a separate classroom dedicated to the lap of mother nature, where children can experiment, learn, relearn, observe and analyze the environment. Develop the needed skills and attitude that shape their behavior towards taking sustainable actions in their day-to-day life.

Keeping EE and CCE as a separate subject at the middle stage is also a current need rather than infusing it with science and social science, which enables the importance of it in their learning and can create a greater impact on children's understanding and attitude towards a particular subject. Children can be sensitized to the subject and can be considered more important.

Developing more materials and specific publications for specific standards is necessary which have uniformity nationwide but are available in all the regional languages that support NEP 2020 vision as well.

Providing in-service workshops and trainings related to teaching EE and CCE which enables teachers to provide proper subject-specific knowledge to the students. CCE is still less focused upon as compared to EE, therefore policy makers should focus more upon introducing it into the curriculum and giving it needed importance along with the EE.

Mostly there are no funds with the school for planning and arranging environmental visits and outdoor sessions etc., therefore all the schools must keep some fixed amount for that purpose only to promote EE and CCE at their campus.

Teachers should also be motivated for teaching out of syllabus contents and enlightening the students about current climate and environmental issues. Rather, both topics should be given special space in the curriculum itself along with a certain fix time allotted to it.

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Conflict of Interest

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