

**THINKING GREEN: FOSTERING ECO CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to examine the importance of English language teachers on environmental education and to create an eco consciousness by integrating environmental education with language teaching. The paper tries to unravel the ways through which language teachers can discover and rediscover the goals and scope of their teaching profession. It shows that the aim of teaching language should not be confined in developing language proficiency in learners but also to foster critical thinking strategies in students their by spreading environmental sustainability among the language learners. Therefore English language teaching can be transformed as an effective instrument not only to create a proficiency in a globally significant language but also to mould a generation of eco sensitive citizens who realize that it is their duty to safeguard our environment.

**Keywords:** environmental education, eco consciousness, environmental sustainability, eco sensitivity, critical pedagogy.

The significance of environmental awareness among children is worth being taken into consideration since they are the future adult citizens. As Kothari Education Commission of 1964 has rightly said "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms". Therefore education with a difference can obviously bring change in India's future. The purpose of including environmental education in teaching English as a foreign language is to create awareness to international ecological problems. Translations of regional literatures to English language also make it possible to critically being aware of the local ecological problems. In this way English language with a wider scope helps to have a global ecological awareness in children. Wilga Rivers indicated that "As language teachers we are the most fortunate of teachers--all subjects are ours. Whatever [the students] want to communicate about, whatever they want to read about is our subject matter".

Language learning is important as it changes and evolves students' understanding of world into concrete ideas. Effective language learning shouldn't just encompass the language acquisition but also should foster eco sensitivity in students that help them positively to avoid future ecological catastrophes. Thinking green and acting green is a major concern in the current ecological situation of our planet. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) state that "environmental education is vital in imparting an inherent respect for nature amongst society and in enhancing public environmental awareness".

Environmental education deals with a wide area of discussion concerned with the environmental destruction caused by the human interventions. These include global warming, ozone layer depletion, greenhouse effect, pollution of air, water and soil, extinction of flora and fauna, climatic changes so on and so forth. Cates points out that "We can't call our English teaching successful if our students, however fluent, are ignorant of world problems, have no social conscience by using their communication skills for international crime, exploitation, oppression or environmental destruction". This can be attained through practical teaching models that are task based and content based modes of learning of language. Students learn faster in the context of relevant, motivating, meaningful and authentic materials which helps students to think and learn through the practice of the target language.

Activities that promote eco consciousness in education could include the following tasks that are writing letters to governments, organizations, and companies to inform them about the ecological injustice taking place in our surroundings, growing trees, reducing use of paper and plastic containers, reusing materials such as glass jars and bottles, recycling materials and buying recycled materials such as recycled paper, educating others and taking part in campaigns to persuade others to participate in eco friendly activities and raising funds for environmental causes and avoiding environmentally unfriendly products, such as those made from endangered species, buying environmentally friendly products, like refrigerators that do not use ozone-depleting chemicals.

Materials for simultaneous teaching of language and promotion of environmental conscientization can be contributed both by teachers and learners in the following ways. They can bring to the classroom articles or audio/videotapes from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV channels or from the internet. Recording and playing songs and poems in English that are associated with eco sensitivity for example Michael Jackson's *Earth Song* or from regional literatures like O N V Kurup's *A Requiem to Mother Earth*. Conducting debate competitions and discussions on environmental education topics related to events taking place in their locality. Writing and framing questionnaires on ecological issues for class mates and after that, students do a questionnaire related to how environmentally friendly the questionnaire items are. For example, do they carry a cloth bag so that they do not collect plastic bags while shopping? Finally they could make resolutions to adopt more eco-friendly behaviors.

Though the inclusion of environmental education in the English language classroom may seem difficult, it is worth trying if we are actually concerned about the welfare of our environment which is becoming an eminent threat to humanity. Language teachers have many opportunities to develop students' awareness about the environmental issues plaguing the planet while remaining devoted to improving students' communicative skills. In addition to a meaningful language instruction, such theme-based instruction inspires students to think critically, provides them with practical knowledge, increases motivation, and promotes learner autonomy.

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