Chapter 15

Conscientize Learners With Littering in Environmental Education by Using Action Research Activities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to provide delegates with a fresh perspective on the littering challenges facing schools and homes in developing countries today, as well as the established skills and awareness intervention strategies necessary to overcome these challenges hence sustaining the teaching of Environmental Education (EE). The extend of Africa’s ignorance of EE subject amongst teachers has intensified and reinforced that action research (AR) be regarded as a tool for learner emancipation in the teaching of EE. EE is still seen as a foreign concept by many teachers and a notion that can be down played in school curriculum and home territory. In this chapter EE has find its way into school environment successfully and effectively through engaging learners as co-researchers with action research approach. The study was designed from educational living paradigm and is underpinned by collaborative learning theory. An intervention in the form of action research spiral cycle activities with the learners has managed to make them conscious about littering.

INTRODUCTION

People’s environmental behaviour and environmental disasters over the years has worsened. Environmental crises including littering are on the increase caused by modern lifestyle. Availability and accessibility of disposal foam and other packaged items wrapped with plastics contributed to their behaviour littering resulting from unsustainable lifestyle.

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Inevitably, litter is perceived as both an environmental and economic concern, as litter is associated with harmful effects for the environment and high costs (Leijdekkers, Marpaung, Meesters, Naser, Penninx, van Rookhuijzen & Willems, 2015). Littering is unacceptable behaviour (Gossow, 2016: 95) and has become a common phenomenon such that, almost everyone on planet Earth litters in one way or the other (Orock, 2017). On daily basis people intentionally or unintentional do litter the environment owing to lack of proper environmental awareness (EA). In turn, lack of EA increases land degradation both in developed and in developing countries such as South Africa (SA). On the other hand, organisation such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) frequently review educational systems across the countries to response to these environmental issues e.g. littering. Environmental issues constantly are on their agendas.

EA of the individual includes environmental knowledge, environmental values and environmental behaviour (Maravić, Cvjetićanin & Ivković, 2014). Education can be used to mitigate specific environmental issues and respond to their impact, but also to address the behaviour that causes them (UNESCO, 2016). In this instance, environmental education (EE) is a form of education designed to raise people awareness towards environmental issues such as littering among other issues. Therefore, government agencies, faith based organisations, non-profit and community groups, labour organisations and the private sector can all contribute to lifelong EE (UNESCO, 2016). EE is regarded as an important tool in the effort to stimulate a well-informed global response to environmental challenges (Maluleke, 2015).

In response to environmental issues and people environmental behaviour, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasises environmental sustainability issues, the need to transform consumption and production to restore balance to life on land and in water, and the need for urgent action on climate change (UNESCO, 2016). Intrinsically environmental action research (EAR) activities in collaboration with learners as co-researchers were conducted to raise their awareness of littering which adds the voice to the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Fourteen learners from seven classes served as co-researchers in this study. A sample was determined out of group of volunteers of learner population per class and convenience sampling was used. Researchers selected two learners out of seven classes irrespective of their age and other factors randomly to have manageable population. The study had more females and 15 years of age.

THE ROLE AND CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION WITHIN SCHOOL AND HOME SETUP

EE is a flexible extra-curricular feature of education that can be taught and practised at home and in all grades levels at school to increase people’s awareness on the environment to alleviate environmental challenges. As EE is not bound to the classroom situation only (Maluleke, 2015). Das (2014: 13) corroborate that EE is not restricted to in-class lesson plans only as there are numerous ways learners can learn about the environment in which they live. For example experiential lessons in the schoolyard and field trips to national parks or after-school green clubs and/or school wide sustainability projects, the environment is a topic, which is readily and easily accessible. The theoretical part of learning and hands-on activities of EE in the environment should impart knowledge that leads to action orientated. Accordingly, EAR activities in EE are influential at home and school as these activities offer knowledge and action.

EE given to the learners gradually starts from garbage sorting, rubbish utilisation, hygiene, and to plant treatment (Amini, 2015: 44) to impart environmental knowledge and action to the learners. In this