Social Network Intervention in Environmental Education

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ABSTRACT

In the recent past Environmental Education (EE) has been introduced as one of the core course in the curriculum of higher education in India. The objective was to make every student aware of the biodiversity and infuse a pro-environmental attitude in them. The efforts to achieve this objective through traditional methods of classroom teaching, predefined syllabus and textbooks has not produced the expected results. We need an approach that will impart values and educate students to conserve and protect various elements of our biological wealth. With so much of success of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube amongst the young generation for information sharing and communication, one is compelled to think whether social networks and social media can be of any help in making courses such as Environmental Education (EE) more attractive and informative. With this guided inquiry we used Facebook’s information dissemination platform with an aim of creating and promoting learning environment for exploring, proposing strategies, resources, and information sources to students collaboratively. The preliminary results and feedback from student community are very encouraging and motivating, depicting deployment of environment friendly attitude in students.

Keywords: Curriculum, Environment Education, Facebook, Higher Education, Social Media, Social Networks, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Every living being on this planet is connected in one or the other way to their surrounding environment. The very survival of life depends on environmental and ecological balance (Huckle, 1991; Fien & Trainer, 1993). The sensitivity towards the environment need to be created through proper awareness and connecting people to the surrounding environment right at the young age(Fien & Trainer, 1993; UNESCO-UNEP, 1994). Recognizing this important fact, Hon’ble Supreme Court of India, issued directive to concerned authorities belonging to education system in India to include one compulsory core course in environmental studies in their curriculum. The idea was to make our young generation aware of environmental issues such as continuing problems of pollution, solid waste disposal, degradation of
environment, issues like economic productivity and national security, Global warming, the depletion of ozone layer and loss of biodiversity and other related matter.

Hon’ble Supreme Court of India issued another directive in the year 2003, directing the policy makers to streamline the content of the Environment Education courses. This directive lead to restructuring of the Environment Education courses with focus on well-defined course curriculum along with prescribed textbooks (Shinde, Pendse, & Dongre, 2007). Course content was imparted to students mostly through traditional classroom sessions. Students understanding were mostly tested through written assignments and examinations. In this context, the main issue of creating environment awareness amongst the students was cornered and we focused on imparting theoretical content to students through uninteresting content and traditional methodology. Due to this traditional approach of course delivery, student mostly remained as a passive or rote listener/learner. Students treated this course like any other regular course and focused onto it only to get passing grade. According to NCERT “Good environment education requires more than providing mere scientific data on global environment problems in textbooks. Children must be taught and equipped with practical skills to lead environmentally sustainable lives from early childhood so that as adults they will incorporate environmentally sound practices and habits in their daily lives”. The success of such courses normally depends on the initiative and drive of the teachers and the receptive students along with innovative and creative teaching/learning practices equally supported by technology.

With so much of success of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn amongst the young generation for information sharing and communication, one is compelled to think whether social networks and social media can be of any help in making courses such as environment education more attractive, interactive and student friendly. With this guided inquiry we initiated the study on social network interventions in Environment education using Facebook with an objective of:

1. Providing collaborative forum for information sharing on environment issues using Facebook features;
2. Find and assess the awareness level of students on various environmental issues based on their opinions and quality of remarks/participation in the forum;
3. Find whether there is any improvement in students learning outcome and satisfaction level.

We identified the group of about 120 first year students enrolled in the three year integrated undergraduate course at two colleges from Goa (one from South Goa and one from North Goa), affiliated to Goa University. Initially we conducted survey to identify methods used by teaching community in reaching students along with student satisfaction level with those methods. After understanding the current course content delivery methods and the lacunas associated with those methods, we used social network centric approach offered by Facebook for supplementing students learning needs and provide exploration otherwise was not possible in traditional instructional setup. We utilized the environment awareness reflected through students Facebook posts as evaluation criteria for internal continuous assessments. We investigated the students qualitative and quantitative performance in the proposed social network centric strategy with that of conventional examinations. This was achieved by comparing quality of their responses and scores obtained in the assessments conducted to check the enhancements in quality of learning. The students satisfaction level with the proposed method was quantified using post-test student response using five scale Likert-type scale.
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