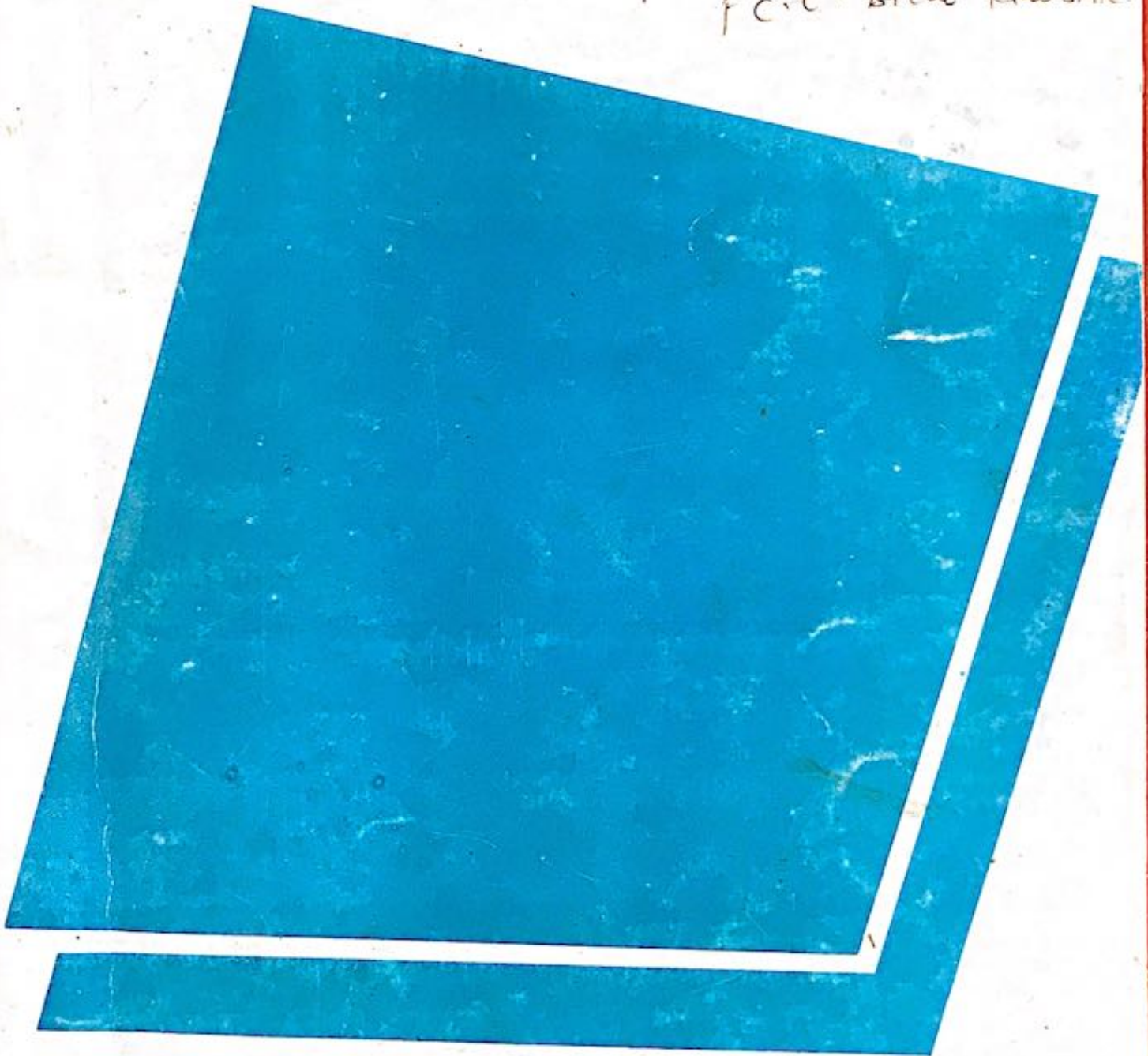


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# STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Our environment is endowed with veritable aggregates of learning and exploitable natural resources needed for comfortable sustenance of life. The serenity of the global environments is currently undergoing serious changes following the depletion of the ozone layer, emission of green house gases, over cultivation, flooding as well as pollution. In Nigeria, awareness on environmental issues is created through jingles in the print and electronic media. At the school front the Nigerian child studies environmental concepts as sub-units of other subjects without well focused, clearly defined aims and objectives. The paper examines the problems associated with the present incomprehensive manner of studying Environmental Education (EE) in our secondary schools as well as the prospects of studying it as a strategic curriculum subject.

## INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Nigerian Educational System (NES) as espoused by the National Policy on Education (NPE, revised 1981) principally focused on academically equipping the Nigerian child with skills and aptitudes for self sustainability, without having to depend solely on paid employment. The document is deficient on provisions for adequately equipping the citizenry with genuine environmentally- friendly values, attitudes and orientation that would predispose them towards sustainable exploitation of the renewable and non- renewable resources of the earth.

According to Palmer and Neal, (1994), environmental education has been well established on the curriculum map of schools for some three decades in the United Kingdom and in other advanced countries. The picture is quite different and gloomy in Nigeria where in primary schools pupils are casually exposed to rudiments of EE in Social or Nature Studies, Health Education and Agricultural Science. Ukpene, (2002), further observed that the SSCE WAEC or NECO syllabus has no Environmental Education as a strategic curriculum for instruction and evaluation. He noted that EE occurs as elements of cross-curriculum with relevant concepts scattered in Biology, Agricultural Science, Geography, Economics, Physical and Health Education respectively. It is only at the higher institution of learning that adequate impetus is given to EE. Thus a large population of Nigerians who pass through the Nigerian educational system fail to imbibe adequate instructional experiences needed for the handling of matters concerning the environment.

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## **WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?**

According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN, 1970) in Palmer and Neal, (1994);

Environmental Education is the process of recognizing values and classifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental Education also entails practice in decision-making and self-formulation of a code of behavior about issues concerning environmental quality.

## **NEED FOR STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

The aerial, arboreal aquatic and terrestrial environment in Nigeria is replete with complex interactive processes most, of which are beyond the comprehension of laymen. Ukpene, (1998) and Ukpene, (2001a) postulated that the most auspicious strategy for making the Nigerian child to understand the natural processes which occur in the environment, as well as generate positive actions to protect and manage it, is to sensitize him through the formal school system.

A strategic EE programme in Nigeria schools would therefore aim at organizing a set of well structured learning experiences to be given to learners to enable them develop the right senses of values, attitudes, understanding and disposition towards the environment and its aggregates of renewable and non-renewable resources. Through it, human tendencies towards destructive exploitation and dominance would change to ones of protection, care and revitalization of environment. Consequently present generations would be able to adequately meet their needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs.

## **PROBLEMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Devoid of an articulate philosophy of Environmental Education in the NPE, several endeavours to entrench a viable environment awareness among Nigerians had been seen as mere political talk that lacked seriousness because little was done to involve the formal school system. The social strategies for educating the populace are checkmated by obvious problems, some of which are summarized below.

### **1. The Political Environment**

Since after the Nigerian civil war, which ended in 1970, subsequent regimes at the apex of governance did not put credence on environmental matters. Rather, they focused mainly on the revitalization of the economy (Through SAP, FEM, Debt Auction and IMF Loans) increasing the economic base of the rural sector (Through DIFFRI, MAMSER, FSP, FEAP and NAPEP) and other laudable programmes that might cushion the crushing effects of poverty on the lives of the citizenry.

## 2. **Diverse Socio-cultural vocations**

The diverse socio-cultural heritage and vocations among Nigerians also pose a problem for people to imbibe and internalize some of the basic teachings and call for restraints in harnessing some of the earth's resources. For instance it is more gratifying to the wood-vending Hausa-Fulani and the lumberjacks in the middle-belt who engage in tree felling to satiate their voracious appetite for wood fuels and timber respectively, the fishermen in the coastal towns who increase their haul of fishes by polluting the rivers with gamalin 20, than for them to heed the calls for restraints. Also, exploration of solid minerals in some parts of the country had destroyed the soil structures and exposed them to weathering activities and erosion effects.

## 3. **Poverty:**

Poverty is expressed as the inability of a people to meet the basic need of food, shelter and clothing (Ukpene, 2001b). Poverty makes it difficult for most families and landlords to properly implement relevant aspects of sanitary education from the mass media, public lectures, posters and jingles. Consequently, faecal and other liquid wastes are indiscriminately deposited in open fields and in other unauthorized places. On the part of government agencies, their inability to provide adequate refuse collection bins at strategic locations in most streets had given ample opportunity to people to litter drains with papers, "pure water" bags, and other solid wastes, sometimes resulting to flooding when it rains. It is noteworthy however, that most indiscriminate disposal of wastes often result, not from the non-availability of waste disposal facilities and public conveniences, but from the abysmal ineptitude of the people toward making proper use of and caring for public utilities and facilities. Few people however discharge energies into the environment unaware of the consequences of their actions.

## 4. **Lack of Environmental consciousness:**

The low level of environmental consciousness coupled with the lack of strict enforcement of environmental laws and regulations in the country made it easy for individuals and corporate firms to indiscriminately dump wastes into the Nigerian environment. Abdullah, (1997), reported that between August 1987 and may 1988, some 3,884 tones of chemical wastes in 10,000 drums from five separate shiploads were deposited near the port of koko, Delta state. He asserted that due to the low level of environmental awareness that pervaded the polity and the weak institutional set up in Nigeria the 'cargo of death' was only discovered after being averted by the Nigerian students in Italy. The awareness created by this discovery led to the establishment of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) in 1988 with the primary responsibility of ensuring the overall protection of the Nigerian environment. This political initiative towards protecting the environment without teaching the young generation to protect their environment through formal instruction is like the proverbial giving of fish to a man without teaching him to fish for himself.

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5. **Cross – Curriculum of Instruction:**

At the school front the teaching and learning of environmental concepts are done in haphazard, improperly organized manner. Under the present system of instruction, Environmental Education has no clearly defined aims and objectives, no strategic curriculum, for instruction and evaluation. The subject is accidentally studied in cross –curriculum, that is, as minor components of other subjects. This makes it difficult for learners to formulate an enduring code of behaviour that would elicit sound judgement in handling matters concerning the utilization of environmental resources.

**PROSPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Life of both present and future generations stands a high risk of impaired living standard if the current spate of environmental deterioration resulting from the ozone layer depletion, emission of radio active properties from nuclear plants, effluents from oil prospecting activities and many other sources of energy is sustained.

In order to ensure that the planet earth retains its serenity and capacity to supply human needs, it is important that the Nigerian Educational System should have a revised philosophy to include all the tenets of EE from the primary schools to the tertiary levels of education, with the sole aim of producing well informed environmentally-conscious citizenry. In an attempt to elucidate on the possible aims and objectives of a prospective EE in Nigeria secondary schools, Ukpene, (2002) cited some of its prospects as follows: -

- A sustainable EE would enable learners to consider different opinions on environmental issues and to arrive at a balanced decision.
- Through it, learners would acquire different skills on generating and interpreting information about the environment either individually or in mixed- ability groupings.
- By acquiring a viable EE, learners begin to appreciate the inter- relatedness between environmental factors and how they interact to affect one another.
- A well articulated EE develops among learners a comprehensive body of knowledge about the environment, both natural and artificial, with capacity to recognize actual problems, and ability to predict potential problems or disasters. It makes learners to critically review their action and that of others so that positive initiatives could be taken to protect and improve the environment.
- Learners are exposed to plausible conflicts and are equipped with strategies for conflict resolution about environmental issues.

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## **SUGGESTIONS**

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should immediately constitute a commission to eke out a philosophy, aims and objectives as well as a curriculum of instruction and evaluation in Environmental Education for primary and secondary levels of education in the country. Such curriculum should emphasize local environmental components to constitute the learning process.
2. Statutory bodies and government agencies should assist in constructing refuse collection bins and public conveniences to reduce the tendency for indiscriminate disposal of fecal and other solid wastes.
3. The Environmental Protection Agencies at both the Federal and State levels should not be allowed to operate independently. Rather an environmental research institute should be established in the country to harmonize the activities of the various agencies. This will, in addition, ensure that the agencies are operating towards achieving their institutional goals.
4. It is now appropriate for the country's environmental laws to be reviewed so that incidence of environmental abuse, misuse and destructive exploitation of its resources could be drastically reduced. When this is done the right of individuals and communities would also be adequately protected.

## **CONCLUSION**

For any meaningful teaching and learning of environmental concepts to be carried out in Nigerian schools, it is vital that Environmental Education should be taught as strategic curriculum subject. Through this, learners would be able to enjoy first hand learning experiences, by carrying out practical investigations and interactions with both natural and man-made environments which paves way for understanding the complex relationships which exist among people, their culture and biophysical surroundings.

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