Brief Report

Designing a Model for Distant Learning on Environmental Ethics for Children

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The active participation in protection of environment is the responsibility of all, but this attitude needs to be encouraged from childhood. Religious beliefs could be one of the best bases to promote Environmental Ethics (EE) in this period. Children could be well-informed and convinced through multiple modes, including distant learning on the importance of EE and the way that they should interact with environment. This would hopefully help to protect the environment for the next generation.

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The earth always provides humans with abundant resources and human beings consider themselves free to enjoy the nature as much as they could. However, it will not take long, before the adverse effects of the excessive use of the environment begin to manifest themselves (1). The destruction of forests, corrosion of earth, advancement of deserts, shrinkage of agricultural lands, decrease in the flora and fauna, and contamination of sea waters calls for preventing air, water and audio pollutions, global warming, and many other problems associated with ramifications of injudicious invasion of the nature by human beings (2). In Islam the environment is considered a divine blessing bestowed by Almighty God on human beings who are responsible for its protection. This is the least gratitude humans can offer to the Creator. Despite the significance of natural resources and the decisive role of the national wealth in sustainable development, any illogical use of the resources would pose a serious threat to the future generations, even if the resources are renewable (3). The great advances in science and technology over the past two centuries has considerably increased humans' ability to invade the nature and environment. The selfish profit seeking behavior, which is promoted in capitalistic beliefs have encouraged these destructive effects on environment as capitalism believes human being, profit, pleasure and freedom are the most important goals in life (4).

1. Importance of Environmental Ethics

Humans have treated the nature and the environment unkindly, most particularly in the past two centuries (3). The current environmental crises in the world have raised the question whether the environment survives with the existing behavior of humans? Technology has enabled human beings to significantly change the environment. Economic growth of nations by relying on the power of technology in its early stages took no heed of the environmental concerns. This has caused irreversible damage to the environment like climate change, the endangering of animal species and numerous types of pollutions on the earth.

There is a growing trend in craving for a new ethical code named Environmental Ethics (EE) (5). It is now clear that despite development of more environmental friendly technologies, there is no significant change in trends in destruction of environment globally (6). This further emphasizes the importance of promoting EE. Environmental ethics refers to a set of behaviors, which if applied to production, consumption and other areas of human and environmental interaction would minimize damage to the environment, thus provide a safer environment for life of not only the human but all the creating beings (7).

2. Childhood as the Most Effective Time for Promoting Environmental Ethics

Promoting this attitude in childhood may have more sustainable effect on future behavior. This has made elementary education as a target for interventions to endorse EE. Conscience and ethical norms develop in children even before entrance to the elementary school

but are sustained at the elementary school. Youth's awareness can strengthen their spirit of adaptability to the environment, boost their sense of responsibility and motivation in relation to logical protection of the environment (8).

3. Importance of Spiritual Approach in Promoting Environmental Ethics

One of the best approaches to circumvent the current human made tribulations for the environment including climate change, endangering the living species and different types of pollutions which all pose serious threat to the life of future generations is turning to and drawing inspiration from religion and its ethical guidelines.

Continued environmental crises have changed global perspective towards religion recognizing it as an effective factor in reducing environmental harms. Our behavior is shaped by our thoughts. Any efficient environmental policy needs collectiveness and religious and ethical support (9). Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, as the divine religions respect the nature and the entire universe as the creature of God and mandate believers not to destruct or destroy this God gift. All of these religions consider living in healthy and sound environment as a right for all creatures including human, animals and plants as an ethical precept. For instance, Islam has an impressive set of rules including a tenet that goes "God bestowed wisdom and reason on humans as an inherent must. Hence, human being as the creature tasked with running the earth, must protect it in good faith".

4. Distant Learning for Environmental Ethics Teaching in Childhood

Although the traditional courses of experimental science, geography, chemistry and biology are opportunities to promote EE, the paucity of motivated and capable teachers and the sophisticated materials which should be provided and the importance of using more effective educational technologies makes distant learning an attractive module for promoting EE (10).

Distant learning means a designed education system which is intended to organize the teaching-learning process by an organization, and not by a teacher (11). The aim of this process is to develop and apply the best approaches to new education technologies, facilitate interaction between the teacher and student, enable direct learning and evaluate the knowledge acquired by the learners themselves. Other learning tools and materials such as radio, television, videos, internet, and cell phones are used as supplements to the foregoing self-learning materials. Environmental ethics is among priorities that deserve more attention in today's world (3).

5. A Model for Distant Learning on Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics education should be considered as a special process that would affect the thoughts of students, their emotions, feelings and personal behaviors. This should take account of the motivations, emotions and feelings of students with regard to the environment; therefore, these could lay out the foundation of ethics in the developing students' personality (12).

In teaching environmental concepts, the tangible needs of students should be the major consideration (13). The first possible confrontations of the children and environment should be well-addressed in educational activities in a transparent and conclusive manner with emphasis very clearly on what is right and what is wrong in concordance with their spiritual beliefs on the responsibilities of human in front of God, then through exercise and repetitions the student should be empowered to have abstract thinking and reasoning on the principles (14).

The new education technologies, which facilitate bilateral relationship between the teacher and the student, enable direct learning while providing the opportunity to evaluate the acquisition of knowledge by the learners themselves should be used.

Although the educational technologies are important, the content must also be well-designed in a way that in the appropriate context would provide the most effective and sustainable influence in the personality and beliefs of the children.

6. Conclusions

The need to promote environmental ethics is a must for the next generation. Religious beliefs could be one of the best bases for this need. Children could be well-informed and convinced through multiple modes, including distant learning on the importance of EE and the way that they should interact with environment. This would hopefully help to protect the environment for the next generation.

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Authors' Contributions

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