



## **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Environment Education**

Dr R. Baskar and Dr Sushmitha Baskar  
Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

Environment education is not merely another subject taught in formal educational setups. It is a dynamic and evolving process that equips young learners to understand their surroundings and identify the challenges threatening them. In the current climate-risked world, environment education must not only equip learners to identify local as well as global environmental challenges, but also to adapt to them effectively. In this regard, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a welcome first step. It places a strong emphasis on addressing environmental concerns such as climate change, pollution, waste management and conservation of biological diversity. It presents a compelling vision for a holistic system of learning, emphasising the integration of environment education into the curriculum. The policy aims to promote a strong understanding and sensitivity towards environmental conservation and sustainable development principles. The importance of this recommendation extends beyond schools to include higher education institutions (HEIs), underscoring its significance at all levels of education. It is worth noting that the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 did not address Environmental Studies (EVS) as a separate subject but NPE 1986, and the Programme of Action 1992, recommended the inclusion of environment education and protection within the formal education system. The policy recognised the importance of raising environmental awareness and for it to reach people of all ages and backgrounds, starting with children. The NPE 1986 & POA 1992 emphasised that teaching in schools and colleges should be guided by environmental consciousness.

While NPE 1986 initiated a discussion around including environment in education, it did not provide any specific curriculum framework for institutions. NEP 2020, however, fills in the gap by providing guidelines, course content, and credit requirements for a mandatory course on EVS. This article will explore the recommendations of NEP 2020 for environment education and its implementation in HEIs.

### **Environment Education in HEIs**

NEP 2020 encourages holistic and multidisciplinary education through flexible and innovative curricula for all HEIs. The policy recommends that the HEIs should offer credit-based courses and projects related to community engagement, service, environment education, and value-based education.

It is relevant to mention that the Supreme Court ordered the University Grants Commission (UGC) to include a course on EVS at every level of education because of the neglect of the environment in our academic programs. In 2003, the UGC developed a mandatory six-month

core module course for EVS for all Indian universities and colleges, following the directions of the apex court.

The UGC has taken a major step by creating guidelines and curriculum framework for Environment Education, following NEP 2020 recommendations, announced on World Environment Day, 2023. The guidelines being presented now are an updated version of the syllabus developed by UGC in 2017 — a modified version of the 2003 syllabus. This eight-module course, which was a part of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), was originally classified as an Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course (AECC). The courses that are designated as 'AECC' have a specific focus on enriching knowledge through the content offered. All disciplines were required to adhere to these guidelines.

The UGC Guidelines for Institutional Development Plan, 2024 — considered a key document to implement the recommendations of NEP 2020 — also emphasises the importance of environmental responsibility. This includes promoting energy efficiency, waste reduction, and minimising environmental impact. The green campus strategy focuses on preserving the ecosystem through safeguarding the natural landscape, reducing carbon emissions, and conserving water resources. It suggests promoting awareness campaigns to encourage environmental consciousness. The guidelines suggest prioritising recycled materials and considering heat island effects in sustainable infrastructure designs. Educational campuses must achieve sustainable mobility and phase down fossil fuels by implementing efficient transportation strategies, embracing eco-friendly technologies, and adopting alternative energy sources.

### **Curriculum Framework for Environment Education at UG Level**

Starting from the academic session 2023-2024, the UGC has designed a mandatory course on environment education for all undergraduate courses as an initiative to implement NEP 2020. The course will also address the obligation of the nation to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The new environment education curriculum has a multidisciplinary approach, covering crucial issues such as climate change, sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity, pollution, sanitation, waste management, and forest and wildlife protection. The curriculum has been designed to allow an interdisciplinary approach to understanding these issues. It covers eight interdisciplinary topics and includes an additional unit dedicated to practical exposure and fieldwork training.

Previously, environment education was only available as an elective or optional course, but it has now been included as a main subject. The updated curriculum allows students to prioritise practical knowledge and real-life aspects of the environment over theory. Institutions will have the flexibility to choose how to teach the subject, according to the UGC. Students can achieve the proposed credits for the course within a timeframe of six to eight semesters. It has also been suggested that this course should carry four credits. HEIs have the flexibility to determine the suggested number of credits per course and credit distribution over 6 to 8 semesters.

The course design includes community engagement, service, and practical comprehension of environmental threats. It underlines the need for 'value-based' education that focuses on environmental protection and sustainable development. This is a crucial aspect since more sensitive and constructive attitudes & behaviour patterns towards the environment form the core of any course on environment education. In addition to knowledge building,

environment education should develop an acceptance of responsibility for mitigating and adapting to environmental crises.

In India, numerous universities offer certificate, diploma, and degree programs in Environmental Studies and related disciplines. The Education Ministry's e-learning portal SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) provides teaching materials, videos, and other online content for the subject and is open to everyone.

These guidelines cater to students from “diverse disciplinary backgrounds and also include topics to sensitise students about the nation's commitment *towards achieving sustainable development goals*” (Guidelines and Curriculum Framework for Environment Education at Undergraduate Level, UGC 2023).

### Summing it up

In summary, NEP 2020 underscores the importance of environment education, aiming to create environmentally aware and responsible citizens who contribute to sustainable development and conservation efforts. Environment education will be integrated into school and undergraduate curricula, community outreach initiatives, and public awareness campaigns through this policy. It is important to start early because children are highly receptive to learning and can develop lifelong habits and attitudes towards the environment.

Environment education is not just a curriculum; it is a pathway to a sustainable and harmonious future. By fostering a sense of responsibility, cultivating a strong bond with nature, and equipping individuals with the knowledge to address environmental issues, we can empower people to develop responsible attitudes towards the environment. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, integrating environment education into our education system is crucial and transformative for the well-being of our planet and future generations. Let's not overlook the connection between environmental issues, our economy, and our future survival.

Inclusive growth hinges on sustainability.

### About the authors



Prof Ramanathan Baskar — a GEN member — serves as a geology professor at the School of Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in New Delhi. With more than 26 years of teaching experience, he oversees undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs in Earth and Environmental Sciences. Before IGNOU, he was the director of Public Outreach and chairperson of the Department of Environmental Science and Engineering at Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology in Hisar, Haryana.



Dr. Sushmitha Baskar is presently working in the School of Interdisciplinary and Trans-disciplinary Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi. Her interests include Environmental Science, Environmental Microbiology and Geomicrobiology. She has over 80 research papers and articles and has authored 4 books. She regularly gives lectures on Gyanvani (FM105.6) and Gyandarshan Channel. She is also a science journalist for Current Science, Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore.