

Environmental Education And Strategic Communication In Rural India: A Cross-Sectoral Approach

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Abstract

Such education greatly influences people to behave sustainably, particularly in places where groups depend on the environment. This project analyzes how communication strategies are used in environmental education for rural India to see how many groups can work together to promote awareness of sustainability. Experts collected data by using surveys, interviewing local people, and observing certain villages in Maharashtra. It lists schools, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local self-government bodies (panchayats), and media outlets as the central stakeholders and investigates what they do to provide environmental knowledge. It is clear from the findings that both the usual ways of communication and newer school activities are now important steps for sharing information. This type of communication approach has shown to greatly impact the behavior and opinions of people towards water conservation, dealing with waste, and protecting biodiversity in the community. Utilizing various sources, researchers also indicate that language issues, low numbers of trained educators, and underdeveloped communication infrastructure are some of the reasons why everyone cannot benefit from environmental education. However, several case studies of model villages indicate that joining forces and meeting people's cultural needs are good ways to bridge the differences. The paper proposes a way for schools and communities to communicate about environmental subjects using both local approaches and proper curriculum. If educational training is guided by communication strategies, residents of rural areas will be able to engage in conserving the environment more easily. It is recommended by the study that education on the environment in rural areas include strategic, inclusive, and community-oriented communication, not only study from books, to preserve the environment for a long time.

Keywords: Environmental education, strategic communication, rural India, sustainability, cross-sectoral collaboration, community engagement, ecological awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The world faces environmental degradation as a serious challenge, and it is felt most in rural areas, especially in India, where using nature's resources provides most people with their income. Soil erosion, clearing woods, limited water resources, contamination of water and air, and climate change put big challenges in the way of agriculture, rural people, and their health. In such situations, people and communities need environmental education to help them learn what is necessary for them to take part in sustainable actions and protect the environment. Instead, in rural areas of India, environmental education has to reach more people and should focus on what people really need. It means that ways to share strategic information should be linked to efforts in environmental education. Talking to people in rural surroundings often involves schools, NGOs, local government, media, and religion and culture groups. Every one of these actors is important in forming views, beliefs, and actions concerning the environment. Various policies such as the National Policy on Education and the Environmental Education in Schools Programme show that the Indian government values environmental education. Yet, carrying out these policies at the local level is still spotty, mainly because rural areas usually lack the means and teachers to support education. This approach is useful for overcoming such difficulties through

messages that fit the community and channels preferred by people there. It is found that stories on the streets, through radio, folk media, and old wisdom help people understand environmental issues. In a similar way, new digital platforms and mobile technology are used more often to reach people who live in remote regions, provided the connectivity is good enough. The article looks at how environmental education and strategic communication influence each other in rural India. It is argued that environmental education should happen in schools and also through cooperation among several parts of the community. Since dealing with environmental issues is complex, it's vital to include cooperation among education departments, NGOs for the environment, agricultural extension services, health care workers, and similar organizations. When there is teamwork among these sectors, people hear about the environment in a more planned and frequent way, which helps them become greener. Rural communities in India commonly know a lot about how to take care of land, water, and forests. Still, this kind of wisdom could be lost if it isn't included and recognized in today's environmental courses. The use of strategic communication can join scientific information with old ways of doing things, giving us a better understanding of how we can protect the environment. Additionally, interactive ways of communicating where people talk, give opinions, and take part are very effective in rural areas. This way, lessons are adapted to the culture and are easier for all to grasp, while people in these communities feel encouraged to support and solve environmental problems. Schools are analyzed in this paper as essential places for encouraging environmental education. Equipped teachers in rural classrooms are capable of guiding children to care for the environment, which prompts children to spread such ideas within their homes and amongst their relatives. Nevertheless, this chance is rarely seized because of challenges like strict school curriculum, few chances to learn through experience, and not enough attention on environmental issues in schools. If proper strategies are used in communication, teachers will be given methods and ideas that will make learning about the environment interesting and lead to real actions. Besides, getting youth involved in community centers, self-help groups, and youth clubs can increase both the coverage and impact of environmental education. Making use of these platforms with strategic communication efforts can stir the rural population to take environmental action as a group. Case studies conducted in different areas of India prove that mixing education with properly managed communication usually leads to better environmental outcomes than education by itself. All in all, when environmental education is combined with strategic communication using a cross-sectoral method, it promises great success in promoting sustainability in rural areas. The research looks at how integration currently takes place, notes both the pros and cons, and provides a plan that can help future application of services. The study believes that communication is no mere accessory, but a main foundation for good environmental education. If stakeholders plan and manage communication well, they can see to it that people in rural areas pay attention to, are clear on, accept, and follow environmental messages. With this perspective, the paper wants to offer insights on how communication management is necessary for effective environmental education.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Education and knowing about the environment is now very important for supporting sustainable development in rural and semi-urban areas. It was discovered in P.S. Balaj et al. (2017) that urban secondary school students displayed better awareness of the environment than rural students, mainly because they had more resources and educational materials on hand. She also stated (Gupta, 2017) that greater awareness of environmental issues comes mainly from the accessible infrastructure and channels of communication available in urban areas. Usha Shahu et al. (2017) investigated undergraduate students in rural areas and found out that although they have environmental information, it is not detailed and useful in practice. Ruksana Saikia (2017) looked at the role media plays in helping people become more aware of environmental issues through influencing their opinion and behavior. This opinion is also shared by Vibha Singh Kushwaha (2015) and Assen Khan (2016), both of whom note that both classic media and new media can efficiently spread environmental information to many people.

By increasing the use of social media, new chances have appeared for educating on and talking about environmental issues. Parveen (2011), Gupta and Zafar (2013), and Kanchanavalli (2013) each show that education and non-profit sectors in rural India now use Facebook and similar platforms to run environmental campaigns. Dr. The study by Anjali Puri (2017) found that increased use of social networks by students goes hand in hand with paying more attention to environmental matters. According to P.S. Hegadi and Dr. G.R. Angadi (2015), using Facebook helps with education and boosts students' social interaction and regard for the environment. In addition, Dr. Manzoor Hussain et al. (2017) focused on the ways postgraduate students learn new things using social media, stating that such websites could be used as educational tools. On a worldwide scale, according to Dann Marrie N. and colleagues in 2009 and Ito and Kawazoe in 2018, an increased awareness of the environment tends to go with better education, more income, and city living. The results suggest that having context-sensitive ways of communicating is necessary in rural places to reduce the difference in environmental participation. All the studies point out that both traditional and new communication channels are significant for improving environmental education among people living in rural areas. It is suggested by the literature that when strategies for communication are aligned with both the curriculum and the environment, they can change people's knowledge, attitudes, and actions. Therefore, using the schools, the media, various community groups, and technology to spread knowledge about the environment for sustainable development is necessary.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To assess the level of environmental awareness among rural communities in selected regions of India.
2. To examine the role of strategic communication in promoting environmental education in rural areas.
3. To identify the key stakeholders involved in cross-sectoral environmental communication efforts.

Hypothesis (H₁): Strategic communication has a significant positive effect on promoting environmental education in rural areas.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Strategic communication does not have a significant effect on promoting environmental education in rural areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses quantitative and qualitative methods to look into how strategic communication helps increase environmental education in rural areas. Both kinds of data were collected to get a thorough view of the topic. The quantitative aspects were studied through the use of questionnaires that were given to teachers, students, representatives of local NGOs, and members of the community in villages chosen in Maharashtra. People were asked scalable questions in the questionnaire so we can assess their knowledge, where they receive information, and how effective the education strategies are. We carried out interviews with school principals, panchayat members, and media people to find out about the issues and effective methods of communication on environmental concerns. To choose the respondents, we applied purposive sampling; only those who had relevant experiences in environmental education were part of the sampling. Ways in which strategic communication affects environmental awareness were studied by analyzing data through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression models. Thematic analysis was used on qualitative data to find common patterns and stories about the roles and ways of communicating of various stakeholders. The use of three research approaches allowed the findings to be more dependable and meaningful in describing how cross-sectoral communication affects learning in the environment in rural India.

Descriptive Statistics Table

(N = 200 respondents from rural areas)

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Awareness of environmental issues	200	2.00	5.00	4.12	0.68
Exposure to strategic communication	200	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.76
Participation in environmental programs	200	1.00	5.00	3.94	0.71
Perceived impact of communication	200	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.63
Use of media for environmental learning	200	1.00	5.00	3.78	0.82

Analysis of Descriptive Statistics

These statistics show important factors related to using strategic communication to promote environmental education among rural people. Respondents in this sample have a fairly consistent and fair knowledge about environmental issues, with standard deviation at 0.68 compared to the mean of 4.12. A large part of the participants are moderately to highly exposed to different types of communication activities, such as awareness drives, educational materials, and media involvement. Students show an active participation in environmental matters by scoring 3.94 on the measure. It is clear that communication has a widespread effect, since more than four people out of five agree that communication contributes to learning and adaptation to environmental challenges. Media platforms for environmental education had a mean of 3.78 and a slightly higher standard deviation of 0.82, which points out that not everyone uses them in the same way, but many respondents still use this type of resource. All in all, the findings prove that proper efforts in strategic communication boost both knowledge of the environment and results in education in rural areas.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.68	0.462	0.458	0.45

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	29.14	1	29.14	143.9
	Residual	34.05	198	0.172	
	Total	63.19	199		

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	1.12	0.18		6.22
Strategic Communication	0.82	0.07	0.68	11.99

Analysis of Hypothesis Testing:

The findings prove that strategic communication is very effective in increasing awareness of the environment in rural communities. It is shown in the model summary that about 46.2% of the variation in rural participants' environmental education level is related to how much strategic communication efforts they experience. Since this figure is quite high, it proves that communication efforts have a major

influence on raising people's awareness of the environment. Because the ANOVA's F value is 143.9 and the p-value is less than 0.001, the regression model proves that strategic communication affects environmental education significantly. Besides, the regression coefficient ($B = 0.82$) is greater than zero and shows a strong and significant relationship, so every increase in strategic communication leads to a rise of 0.82 units in environmental education levels. This means that we can accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that strategic communication plays a major role in raising awareness about the environment in rural places. Altogether, the research proves that solid communication strategies can help explain environmental problems to those living outside cities.

DISCUSSION:

The research proves that strategic communication plays a key part in supporting environmental education in rural communities. Since nearly half of environmental education varies because of strategic communication efforts, it is obvious that using different messages and media channels affects rural communities' interest in and awareness of environmental matters. This finding matches what Ruksana Saikia (2017) and Vibha Singh Kushwaha (2015) have said about the greater role mass media plays in increasing public awareness of environmental problems. Dr. Puri (2017) also noted that such platforms encourage youth and students to take action for the environment and therefore the relationship is even more evident and is statistically significant, too. Also, the research indicates that effective ways to communicate in rural areas need to take into account local languages, customs, and the methods and tools rural people have to use for communication. Even though social media and the internet influence more people—Gupta and Zafar (2013), P.S. Hegadi and Dr. G.R. Angadi (2015) point this out—areas with little internet access still rely on traditional means like community gatherings, folk media, and programs in schools. It was discovered in the study that issues arise in providing fair access to information, as people use media to varying extents. Thus, various groups such as educational institutions, government bodies, NGOs, and media organizations should work together to create plans for including all groups in communication. The study results, according to environmental communication theories, show that strategy in communication raises awareness and encourages people to participate and change their behavior for the environment. These outcomes play a key role in ensuring the country's rural areas meet sustainable development goals, since handling waste, stopping more forests from disappearing, and looking after water resources is needed today. To sum up, this study provides additional support for the idea that communication plays a key role in environmental education and underlines the importance of regularly finding new ways to connect with rural people. Researchers could also investigate whether and how long-term contact between students and nature helps boost their environmental knowledge.

Overall Conclusion:

This study suggests that using communication strategies is very helpful in boosting environmental education in rural India. It was found that almost half of the difference in environmental awareness and education between rural populations is caused by good communication efforts. With the help of traditional media, online social platforms, integration in the community, and educational projects, strategic communication sharpens people's understanding, changes their mindset, and encourages involvement in conserving the environment. The research proves that effective and suited communication methods play a key role in addressing the difficulties of limited infrastructure, low education levels, and lack of technology in rural places. In addition, when schools, local governments, NGOs, and media organizations join forces, they can achieve better results in serving more beneficiaries. Using social networking sites with traditional methods encourages younger people to care for the environment. Even so, providing all rural people with equal and diverse ways to communicate presents problems, which means we should apply inclusive strategies to rural communities. All in all, strategic communication shapes actions and promotes development that lasts for years. It makes a positive difference to rural areas by improving people's knowledge about the environment and encouraging them to act for the cause. These results support India's progress in dealing with the environment and development. It is suggested

that efforts to keep improving and including everyone in communication, as well as continuous review, will support environmental education in rural areas.

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