

Environmental education via field-based activities: teachers as change agents

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Environmental Education (EE) is a most important component of any environment management system. The concept of applying field-based activities for studying the environment at school level is being increasingly given recognition. This paper is based on an EE project conducted in Hambantota and Tangalle coastal zone area, to improve environmental awareness and knowledge among school children and teachers and to establish a system of

gathering and dissemination of scientific data collected through field-based activities. It focuses on two main research questions: What is the effect of field-based activities in developing the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers and students? and, What impact this programme has had on teachers in their roles as change agents in preparing school children to engage in coastal resource monitoring activities?

The process included designing field-based activities, preparation of a simple monitoring kit for carrying out activities and training of teachers to conduct activities and record gathered scientific data in an electronic database. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, field observations and reflective journals of teachers. The deviation from traditional classroom teaching to a field-based approach was found to be very effective in enhancing student motivation and active participation of students. Time restrictions, English language skill limitations of students, technical problems, and negative attitudes of community were some constraints faced. Pre-preparation, organization, cooperation and commitment of teachers were the key factors that affected the success of implementing this field-based approach in schools. Adoption of a field-based learning approach was far more effective in developing the desired competencies of students than traditional classroom-based teaching. Teacher motivation was crucial to successful implementation of the activities. Longer term establishment of such teaching-learning methods for EE at the school level will require regular training and re-training of teachers with continual monitoring of activities.