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Investigating Availability and Utilization of Nature Corner as Curriculum Resources for Effective Instruction by Pre Service Science Teachers on Teaching Practice Exercise in South–South Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract: **The study was carried out to investigate the availability and utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction by pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise in south south zone of Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of all the pre service science teachers in tertiary institutions in south south zone of Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised of one hundred and twenty (120) pre service science teachers from faculty of education in the universities and one hundred and twenty (120) pre service science teachers from colleges of education drawn from the six (6) state in the south south zone of Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a structured four-point scale questionnaire. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistical tool. The results of the data analysis showed the availability of nature corner in most schools, but in very limited. The study also indicates the extent to which teachers use the nature corner for instructional purposes. The study shows high extent of utilization of the available nature corner. Furthermore, the results from the study also showed the types of collections in the nature corner to includes plants and leaves, charts, poster and waste materials for science teaching. Also, the results show the challenges affecting effective use of nature corner by science teachers to include inadequate space for nature corner in the classroom, poor attitude of teachers toward the use of nature corner amongst others. The study recommended remedy to these challenges to includes provision of instructional materials in the nature corner by government and other spirited citizens, adequate of space in the classroom for nature corner by the school authorities, integration of learning resources from the nature corner during teaching and learning despite the availability of modern education facilities.**

Keywords: **Basic science, Education, Learning, Nature corner, Teaching, Utilization.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the challenges of science education is the training of future science teachers in innovative curriculum resources that enable the construction of scientific knowledge in their students. One way of achieving this is to experience this curriculum resources first-hand to analyze, from their role as students, different aspects such as the knowledge learning experienced and the possible difficulties in their implementation. According to Edu, Ejemot and Ukpebi (2021) discussions on the resources for effective teaching and learning emphasis has been more on using modern learning resources such as

computers, Internet, multimedia, language laboratories etc. This is necessary considering the fact that such modern curriculum resources can facilitate learning and open new frontiers of knowledge. However, what is not necessary is the overwhelming assumption that with so much change in the learning resources setting, there is likelihood to forget or even neglect older learning resources. Such assumption would be a waste of a wealth of valid resource because most of the older resources have been proved to be very effective and must remain effective over time (Hannon, 2000)

One of such older resources that have been used in most schools in Nigeria especially at the basic level of education is what is referred to as Nature corner. Where local authentic materials and real objects from the environment are kept. Such authentic materials comprise mainly of students and teachers' collections of objects in their environments such as grains, shells, cans, bottles, skins etc. It could also contain charts, graphs, maps, magnets, building blocks, insects, feathers, mirrors, flowers among others. Nature corners are small educational spaces dedicated to contain learning items where students can experiment, discover and learn something new based on their interests When these items are properly utilized in the classroom by the science teachers, nature corner can be very effective instructional resources for promoting the teaching of science concepts at the basic education level, which is the foundational stage in Nigeria education system. Nature corner has proven to be very appropriate for promoting the learning of science at an early age. (Cifre-Mas, and Adrover, 2012). Nature corners are also educational spaces that make it possible to cater for student's differences and get to know each student learning rhythms and interests and curiosities.

The goal of science is to understand the natural world through a process of scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry according to Worth (2010) helps the learner explain the world around, such as why water evaporates and the plant grow in a certain location. Scientific inquiry also assists to predict what may happen in future, either to the environment or humanity.

Cornelius-Ukpepi (2013) opined that proper development of science at the basic education level is the pivot to the successful development of science at other levels of education. In the same vein, the National Policy on Education (2013) highlight the objectives of science learning at the basic education level to include, the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; develop in the child, the ability to adapt to his changing environment; and giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limit of the capacity.

The implication of this is that at the completion of basic education, students are expected to be adequately exposed to the process of scientific inquiry. However, this seems to be an illusion in the Nigeria basic education system. This is because of the challenges faced by both teachers and students in the understanding of basic scientific concepts in terms of teaching and learning.

To provide solution to this problem and promote the teaching and learning of basic science concepts, it is the responsibility the teacher to create scientific learning environment in the classroom. The science teacher should get the students science resources to unlock the science in them. One of such science teaching and learning resources is Nature Corner. This research therefore tends to investigate the availability and utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction by pre service science teachers on teaching practice in south-south zone of Nigeria.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Nature corner as curriculum resources plays vital role in instructional delivery in the classroom. It is one of the most important resources useful for promoting the effectiveness of teaching and learning of science at the basic education level. Also, the presence of nature corner forms part of educational resources in the school environment that impacts greatly on teacher's competence in the classroom. But presently, science teachers have abandoned the use of nature corner as curriculum resources in classroom teaching and learning activities. This is due to the fact that modern technology and new learning resources may have leads some science teachers to consider nature corner outdated or ineffective. Also, the inability for science teachers to understand and properly utilize them in the classroom to promote teaching and learning. The neglect of nature corner cannot override its usefulness in science classroom delivery, because this resource appeals to all the five senses of sight, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling.

Teaching and learning cannot yield positive results without teachers making use of nature corner as curriculum resources during classroom delivery. Nature corner as educational resources is very crucial for all round development of individual competence within the school environment. Nature corner encourages the students to interact with their surrounding and experience natural phenomena, making them feel more comfortable and engaged in the classroom. Nature corner can be a

valuable tool for teaching scientific concepts at the basic education level using locally sourced materials and objects in the environment. The purpose of this research is to investigate the availability and utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction by pre service science teachers on teaching practice in south-south zone of Nigeria.

III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this research is to investigate the availability and utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction by pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise in south-south zone of Nigeria.

The objectives of the research are;

1. To find out the availability of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south-south zone of Nigeria

2. To establish the extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching and learning of scientific concepts by pre service science teachers in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria

3. To ascertain the type of collections of instructional resources in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria

4. To find out the challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the extent of availability of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

2. What is the extent of extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching and learning of scientific concepts by pre service science teachers in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

3. What are the collections of instructional resources in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

4. What are the challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses guided the research.

HO_1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources by pre service science teachers in the Universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

HO_2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating on the types of collections in the nature corner utilize by pre service science teachers in universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

VI. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The use of relevant instructional materials as curriculum resources in the classroom is invaluable since they engage students, aid their retention of knowledge, motivate interest in the subject matter and help to illustrate the relevance of many concepts taught. It would also familiarize students with much needed indigenous knowledge.

The use of nature corner as a curriculum resource is imperative because the loss of students' specialized knowledge of nature is a grave concern for many science educators throughout the world to the extent that commendable efforts are being made to better align educational curricula with indigenous realities and to incorporate local knowledge and language content into school curricula (Umeozor, 2020)

According to Olibie, Adirika, and Geoffrey (2015) when teachers make effective use of authentic indigenous materials as found in nature corners, students become highly motivated which results in improved class attendance and more completed projects and assignments. In addition, students become actively involved in their learning, encouraging comprehension rather than mere memorization of facts

Ugwuanyi (2013) and Wanjiku (2013) nature corner is a designated area in a classroom where students can observe, explore and interact with natural object and materials such as plants, rocks, soil or small animals. It equally serves as an educational tool to encourage curiosity, scientific inquiry and environment awareness. Nature corner provides a rich resource environment grounded in levels of processing theory and modes of learning. It provides not only a vivid and natural environment for the accumulation of facts of a language but also tools to synthesize and integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge. According to Cifre-Mas, and Adrover, (2012) nature corners are small educational spaces dedicated to a topic where students can experiment, discover and learn something new based on their interests. Nature corners are also educational spaces that make it possible to cater for student's differences and get to know each student learning rhythms and interests and curiosities.

VII. NEED FOR NATURE CORNERS FOR THE TEACHING OF SCIENCE AT THE BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL

The use of nature corner for the teaching of scientific concepts at the basic education level has a number of benefits. These benefits according to Edu Aquah & Cornelius-Ukpepi (2023) are:

1. When teachers make effective use of authentic indigenous materials as found in nature corners, students become highly motivated which results in improved class attendance. In addition, students also become actively involved in their learning, encouraging comprehension rather than mere memorization of facts.
2. Nature Corner provides students the opportunity to work individually and in groups, to investigate and solve problems in science.
3. It is a place that attracts attention and a place for experiments and observations in science concepts, which makes science education easy and interesting.
4. It increases student's curiosity in science and improves thinking skills.
5. It reinforces facts, presents students with real life situations in which they learn about facts and ways of manipulating facts

Other purpose of nature corner in education is that it encourages curiosity and exploration by providing students with opportunities to observe natural items and help students to understand concepts in sciences. The increase in environmental concerns makes it even more important for students to study nature and science which is a must for basic education and education environments. Including a nature corner in classroom will give students the opportunities to explore the world around them through hands-on and will help nurture students interest and concern for the environment. When teachers make effective use of authentic indigenous materials as found in nature corners, pupils become highly motivated. Having a nature corner in the basic school classrooms can also make room for the understanding of scientific concepts, help children build positive relationship with science and increase their chance of entering science related careers later in life.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out by using pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise from selected tertiary institutions in South-South zone Nigeria. The descriptive research designs were adopted for this study. The population of the study comprises of all pre service science teachers in tertiary institutions on teaching practice exercise in South-South zone of Nigeria. The sample of the study comprises of one hundred and twenty (120) pre service science teachers from faculty of Education of Universities and one hundred and twenty (120) pre service science teachers from Colleges of Education on teaching practice exercise in south-south zone of Nigeria. The institutions comprise of one University and one College of Education from each state in the zone randomly selected using simple random sampling. A total number of two hundred and forty (240) pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise was sampled.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaires were structured to incorporate both closed and open- ended questions. Items on the instrument was measured on a 4-point scale rating. The questions focus on the availability of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction, the extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources, the collections of items available in the nature corner and the challenges encountered by pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise in the use of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective instruction. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts; one from University of Delta, Agbor and the other one from Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku. A pilot study of the instrument was carried out by administering the instrument to twenty pre service science teachers, ten (10) from the Universities and (10) from the Colleges of education outside the south - south zone of Nigeria to test the its reliability using Person Product correlation coefficient. The result yielded a correction coefficient of 0.78. This indicates that the instrument is reliable. A total of two hundred and forty (240) copies of questionnaire were administered to pre service science teachers used for the study. One hundred and twenty (120) copies each were administered to pre service science teachers from the Universities and Colleges of education on teaching practice exercise. All the administered questionnaire were completed and collected instantly. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistical analyses of mean and standard deviation for the research questions and the null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics.

IX. RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the extent of availability of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the extent of availability of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	DECISION
1.	Nature corners are available at the Basic Education level in my teaching practice school.	2.63	0.90	High Extent
2.	Teachers usually give room for learners to bring instructional materials for the nature corner.	2.18	1.00	Low Extent
3.	Instructional materials in the nature corner are readily provided by the school management	2.22	0.92	Low Extent
4.	The available nature corner supports learners' understanding of Basic scientific concepts.	3.10	0.94	High Extent
5.	The available nature corners help learners relate science lessons to real-life experiences.	3.18	0.92	High Extent
6.	Nature corners make science lessons more interesting and participatory.	2.96	1.04	High Extent
7.	Availability of nature corners contributes to better retention of scientific concepts among learners.	3.05	0.93	High Extent
8.	The availability of nature corners motivates teachers to be more practical oriented in teaching.	3.25	0.92	High Extent
	Grand Mean	**2.85**	**1.03**	

Table one reveals the mean and standard deviation of respondents to the extent of availability of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in Basic education level in south south zone of Nigeria. Any item with mean of 2.50 and above is considered to be used as high extent. Any item with mean below 2.50 is considered to be used as low extent. From the above table, it can be seen that there is availability of nature corner in the schools for the teaching and learning of scientific concepts in Basic Science. And teachers' makes use of the available instructional materials in the nature corner. However, items 2 and 3 in the table indicate that learners and school management are not involved in bringing instructional materials for the nature corner.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching and learning of scientific concepts by pre service science teachers in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Respondents Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching and learning of scientific concepts by pre service science teachers in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	DECISION
1.	Teachers frequently utilize instructional materials in the natures corner during teaching and learning of scientific concepts.	2.60	1.16	High Extent
2.	Teachers integrate instructional materials in nature corner into lesson demonstrations and class discussions.	2.66	0.99	High Extent
3.	Learners are encouraged to explore and handle items from the nature corner.	3.08	0.99	High Extent
4.	Teachers design class activities that involve collecting or organizing items for the nature corner.	2.57	1.07	High Extent
5.	Teachers explore the nature corner as a reference point while teaching Basic scientific concepts.	3.11	1.05	High Extent
6.	Teachers utilizes the nature corner for continuous assessment and project-based learning.	2.99	1.01	High Extent
	Grand Mean	**2.85**	**1.07**	

Table 11 above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching and learning of scientific concepts by pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise in basic education level in south south zone of Nigeria. All items (1-6) in table 11 have a mean of 2.50 and above with a grand mean of 2.85. This indicates that there is high utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources by pre service science teachers in the teaching of scientific concepts in basic science in schools.

Research Question Three: What are the collections of instructional resources in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

Table 3: Respondents Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the type collections of instructional resources in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south.

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	DECISION
1.	The nature corner contains collections of local plants and leaves.	2.93	1.12	High
2.	The nature corner contains preserved animal specimens or models.	2.18	0.98	Low
3.	The natur.e corner includes rocks, soil samples, and minerals	2.10	0.92	Low
4.	The nature corner displays science charts and posters.	3.25	0.95	High
5.	The nature corner has improvised materials made by pupils and teachers.	2.29	0.96	Low
6.	The nature corner contains recyclable or waste materials used for science experiments	2.53	0.97	High
	Grand Mean	**2.85**	**1.07**	

Table 111 above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents on the type's collections of instructional resources in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south. Items (1,4 and 6) with mean of 2.93,3.25 and 2.53 respectively indicate types of collections of instructional materials in the nature

corner prominently used by pre service teachers and students in the teaching and learning of scientific concepts in basic education level. This indicate that the teachers and the students have limited access to instructional materials in the nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria.

Research Question Four What are the challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria?

Table 4: Respondents Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria.

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	DECISION
1.	There is inadequate space in the classrooms to set up a nature corner.	3.11	1.07	Agree
2.	Poor attitude by science teachers towards the use of nature corner in teaching and learning of scientific concepts	3.13	1.03	Agree
3.	Learners show little or no interest in using the nature corner in the classroom	2.90	0.82	Agree
4.	School administrators do not provide sufficient support for maintaining the nature corner.	3.01	1.00	Agree
5.	Lack of exposure on the part of the teacher to the use of nature corner for effective teaching and learning	2.76	0.84	Agree
6.	Availability of modern instructional resources for the teaching of scientific concepts.	3.01	1.03	Agree
7.	Frequent changes in curriculum reduce the emphasis on using nature corners as curriculum instructional resources.	2.34	0.91	Disagree
	Grand Mean	**2.89**	**1.00**	

Table 1V above shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents to the challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner for teaching and learning of scientific concepts in the basic education level in south- south zone of Nigeria. All items from (1-5) are all challenges affecting pre service science teachers in the utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources in the teaching of scientific concepts in basic education level. Challenges such as inadequate space in the classrooms, attitude by science teachers towards the use of nature corner, little or no interest in using the nature corner in the classrooms, lack of exposure on the part of the teacher to the use of nature corner for effective teaching and learning and availability of modern instructional resources for the teaching of scientific concepts are found to be threat to the utilization of nature corner in the teaching and learning of scientific concepts at basic education level. Item 7 with a mean of 2.34 is perceived not to be a challenge in the utilization of nature corner in the teaching and learning process at the basic education level.

Hypothesis One

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources by pre service science teachers in the Universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

Table 5: t- test analysis on utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources by pre service science teachers in the Universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

Institutions	Means	S. D	N	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Universities	2.86	1.05	120	238	0.29	1.97	Do not reject
Colleges of Education	2.82	1.09	120				

Table V reveals the finding with respect to hypothesis one which state that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources by pre service science teachers in the Universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria. From the table, the calculated t-value of 0.29 is less than the critical value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. That mean there is no significant difference in the utilization of nature corner as a curriculum resource by pre service science teachers in the Universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Ho**.** There is no significant difference in the mean rating on the types of collections in the nature corner utilize by pre service science teachers in universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

Table 6: t- test analysis on the types of collections in the nature corner utilize by pre service science teachers in universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria.

Institutions	Mean	S. D	N	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Universities	2.53	1.07	120	238	-0.29	-1.97	Do not reject
Colleges of Education	2.57	1.06	120				

Table VI reveals the finding with respect to hypothesis two which state that there is no significant difference on the types of collections in the nature corner utilize by pre service science teachers in universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria. Analysis in table VI indicates that the calculated t-value of -0.29 is less than the critical value of -1.97 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This shows that there is no significant difference on the types of collections in the nature corner utilize by pre service science teachers in universities and pre service science teachers in Colleges of Education in south-south zone of Nigeria**.** It implies that both the pre service teachers in the Universities and that of colleges utilizes same instructional resources in the nature corner in the teaching of scientific concepts in basic education level in south south zone of Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

The finding of the study revealed the availability of nature corner in most schools, but there is limited provision of instructional materials by school authorities in the nature corner. This is reflected in items 1,4,5,6 and 7 which indicated the availability and usage of nature corner in the teaching and learning of scientific concepts at the basic education level. This finding is in line with Olibie, Adirika, and Geoffrey (2015) who reported that teachers keep collections of instructional materials in the nature corner to promote the awareness of the environment, teaching and display as students project.

The study further revealed that most pre service science teachers to high extent utilizes nature corner as curriculum resources for teaching at the basic education level. This finding corroborates the with the study of Edu Aquah & Cornelius-Ukpepi (2023) stated that nature corner contains living and non-living things used by teachers in the teaching of scientific concepts. Also, teachers display charts, posters and models that students learn from. It was equally stated that the utilization of instructional materials in the nature corner enable students to personally explore and try various ideas, observe results, ask questions, take note of changes occurring in the teaching learning process.

The finding of the study also revealed the types of collections of instructional materials in the nature corner for the teaching and learning of scientific concepts at the basic education level. Analysis in table 111indicate that the mostly used instructional materials in the nature corner are collections of plants and leaves, science chart, posters and models. Also available in the nature corner are waste material use for science equipment. The above instructional materials in the nature corner are prominently use by pre service science teachers at the basic education level.

Finally, the study also established the challenges affecting the effective utilization of nature corner as curriculum resource by science teachers at the basic education level. The challenges ranges from inadequate space in the classroom for setting of nature corner, poor attitude of science teachers toward the use of nature corner as curriculum resources, insufficient provision of instructional materials in the nature corner amongst others. The study also shows that both the preservice teachers in the Universities and their counterpart in colleges of education uses same instructional materials in the nature corner as curriculum resource in the course of their teaching practices exercise.

X. CONCLUSION

The study investigating the availability and utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for effective teaching by pre service science teachers on teaching practice exercise in south south zone of Nigeria. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The result of the study reveals that there is nature corner in most schools by limited. The study also shows that pre service teachers utilizes the available nature corner for instructional purposes. The study reveals that most collections of instructional materials in the nature corner are plants and leaves, charts, posters, models and waste material.

Some challenges identified by the study as its affect effective utilization of nature corner as curriculum resources for instruction are limited spaces in the classroom, poor attitude of teachers in the of nature corner and insufficient instructional materials in the nature corner.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government at all levels and other spirited citizen should provide instructional materials for nature corner in schools. Also, school authorities should always make provision for space in the classroom for nature corner.
2. Teachers should be encouraged to use nature corner during teaching. This will aid illustration of abstract scientific concepts.
3. Curriculum planners should emphasize the integration of learning resources from the nature corner when teaching despite the availability of modern education facilities.
4. Learners should be given project based on resources in the nature corner and must be given opportunity to discover, observe and communicate the basic content of the project.

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