

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

One of the most important and needed task to do in today's world is to ensure the sustainability of the resources the planet has and at the same time to ensure the well-being of humans living on this planet. There is clear need which can be seen is to make the education more effective and efficient in schools. And for this, every stakeholder of the school community has to be sensitized towards sustainability and should understand how their role is vital in today's time. One need to understand that education is the key to sustainable development and just talking about the 'Sustainable Development' concept in schools and institutions will not take us anywhere. We all have to get up and start working on this, not alone but together.

There is a need to re-look and re-visit each and every aspect of the education being taught in schools. Schools curriculum have been designed over the years from the perspective of sustainable education but it has to be implemented in an effective manner.

This article will focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly, the SDG 4, Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education. The author had reviewed the existing literatures on aspects revolving around Sustainable Development and Education, shared his own experiences in the paper along with existing theories/models and had tried to mention the challenges faced by schools and good practices that schools, universities and educational institutions can adopt for Education for Sustainable Development.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals; School Education; Education for Sustainable Development*

Introduction

In order to achieve environmental sustainability, education is an imperative tool. Without education, sustainable development cannot be achieved at any level. The practices within the growing economic trends and the consumption pattern of humans clearly shows the lack of vision in having a sustainable future. And in order to address this challenge, a positive shift in the awareness, knowledge, attitude and behaviour of public is needed and it can be done using education as a tool.

Sustainable Development Goals were announced by the United Nations in 2015, in which countries from all over the world participated and signed the global goals. Since then, it has been a question for everyone mind related to these highly set ambitious global goals. Public have been questioning, doubting and arguing about whether these goals are achievable and realistic in nature.

A lot was achieved during the Millennium Development Goals, which was announced in the year 2000 till 2015. But, there were many gaps which led to the failure of MDGs. And then the SDGs were announced, which gave 17 goals and 169 targets to the world and called it as Agenda 2030 with a motto, 'No one should be left behind'.

And therefore, it becomes more important to not to repeat the mistakes committed during the implementation of MDGs. What we all have to do is to learn from those mistakes and duplicate the success achieved from MDGs during the implementation of SDGs. And one of the clearly identified mistakes was not being able to use Education as a tool in promoting Sustainability.

It is not the fact that the efforts have not been made in the field of Education for Sustainable Development which is largely and internationally denoted as ESD. But it seems to be more of the fact that the Education being provided in schools is much of theoretical in nature and is in the books rather than being hands-on. And that we can call as, 'Education around Sustainable Development. And there is a vital difference between the two terms. One teaches you why the Sustainable Development is important and the other term tells you what action and steps you must take to implement and achieve Sustainable Development in real. Education for Sustainable Development makes you an active and responsible citizen of this planet and it aims at creating a planet which is safe, healthy and livable for everyone now and for the future generations.

Material and Methods

The review article is done with a critical and constructive analysis on the topic, Education for Sustainable Development. The review tried to analyze the trends and patterns of the previous existing literature and studies and find out the research gaps in the current scenario and suggested what new can be done and prioritize to take forward the topic for further research.

In terms of Methodological approach, Narrative type of review is selected. In this, the review of results and findings of some existing literatures and presentation of the current and latest overview of the selected topic are on the basis of Author's experience and qualitative results are shared and discussed.

Goal 4 – Quality Education and Sustainable Development Goals

The 'Sustainable Development Goal 4' (SDG4) advocates for high-quality education for all, which is rooted in a number of international declarations, including the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' 'Convention on the Rights of the Child,' 'World Declaration on Education for All,' 'Dakar Framework for Action,' and the 'Millennium Development Goals,' and thus sees education as vital to the well-being of individuals, nations. ^[1]

The SDG 4 aims at providing universal and equal education to all and it is closely linked with the effective implementation of all other 16 global goals. SDG 4 advocates to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and it has the following targets; Ensure that all girls and boys receive a free, equitable, and high-quality primary and secondary education that results in relevant and effective learning outcomes by 2030. Ensure that all girls and boys have access to high-quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 in order to be prepared for primary school; Ensure that all women and men have equitable access to cheap and high-quality technical, vocational, and postsecondary education, including university, by 2030. By 2030, remove gender gaps in education and ensure that the vulnerable, including individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in precarious situations, have equitable access to all levels of education and vocational training. Ensure that all young people and a significant number of adults, both men and women, are literate and numerate by 2030. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development by 2030, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development, among other things. ^[2]

Relationship between Education and Sustainability

The relationship between the Education and Sustainable Development is not that easy to understand. It is complex in nature. Any nation's capacity to achieve Sustainable Development Goal and targets will depend on the status and level of education. It is the basic requirement which we all have to comprehend. Without this, the set goals and targets would just be a dream. Any goal without a plan is just a wish and following this, we as a nation need an educational plan and strategy in action and not just in paper.

Bringing education as a powerful tool, it can improve the standard of living and quality of life of citizens by generating employment opportunities for the youth, providing safety for women, protecting the environment, providing education to all age groups, reducing dropout rates, etc.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education is key component and the main tool in achieving Sustainable Developing and thus over the past two decades several international conferences, workshops, seminars and symposiums have been organized to feature and build up the importance of Education for Sustainable Development.

The SDGs became very famous since they have been announced in 2015. Tremendous efforts and resources were made in an attempt to increase awareness about the importance of SDGs. SDGs were not seen from the economic perspective only, it focuses on 5P's - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. ^[3]

This was also identified a lot has been tried to done through policy making efforts and technological innovations, but it is very crucial to develop the positive attitude, bring the behavioral change and mass awareness about and towards sustainable development. As a result, education and its outreach activities such as training and capacity building, communication, public awareness, scientific and applied research, information sharing and access, networking, and collaborations, among others, play an important role in achieving SDGs. ^[4]

Apart from the above behavioral change, it is very important to understand the role of psychological perspective and approach in achieving SDGs. Many Education for sustainable development (ESD) programmes aims to improve people's attitudes and beliefs toward nature. Contextual support, social norms, action difficulty, and habitual behaviour, among other things, are all elements that influence behaviour, according to psychological studies. If people's views are to change, education must go beyond that to help them act in ways that are consistent with their values. ^[5] The study had put efforts to show that there are weak links between attitudes and behaviour through Psychological Research and this shall be taken into consideration while designing Educational Programmes for Sustainable Development in Schools.

In the recent times, the focus of education has been shifted to gain and equip the 21st Century Skills as it is imperative if one has to improve the quality of education and outcomes and results of learning level at all levels of education. ^[6] The world is changing at a

rapid rate and to ensure that we are able to timely address challenges the world and humanity is facing, the 21st century skills are needed.

Several challenges have been identified such as school dropouts especially at early age, youth unemployment, unskilled human force, continuous re-skilling of citizens, urbanization and multi-cultural immersion. These are the challenges of the 21st Century and to address these challenges, it is vital to update the educational curriculum of schools, the kind of educational resources and the pedagogical approach we are using.^[7]

COVID – 19, Education and Sustainable Development

The COVID – 19 showed us the real challenges the country can face. It is due to the COVID – 19, the world has started thinking intensively again about the Sustainable Development Goals. The schools are closed for almost two – years now across the globe and the country. We all had never thought and seen the world like this before. Schools being closed has created a huge learning gaps and it will take another few years to overcome this.

No doubt, a huge transformation has been seen and witnessed in the digital and technological field, where we can see various kinds of initiatives started and tools being used to provide education to children in India. But being a country with majority coming from the rural areas, there are millions of students with no network, phones and classes. Here, it becomes necessary to provide basic education first and then one can focus on sustainable development through education.

The definitions of the Sustainable Development focus on meeting the present needs without compromising the future needs. But forget about the future needs, the during and post-COVID situation shows that we will need enormous amount of time to meet even the basic needs of citizens and hence it creates a question on how realistic as a nation we are when we say that SDGs have to be achieved by 2030. The question is that are we really taking the learning from COVID – 19 and preparing ourselves for Sustainable Development.

New Education Policy and its Vision to Education for Sustainable Development

National Education Policy (NEP) was introduced in 2020 becoming India's first education policy of the 21st Century. NEP is introduced with a vision on Education for Sustainable Development and is expected to move India on the track to achieve Goal 4, Quality Education, by offering inclusive and equitable education to all. NEP has put a special consideration on the need of structuring the entire education system of the country if India wants to timely achieve the set goals and targets.

NEP 2020 has put a focus on providing comprehensive and integrated environmental education including areas such as sustainable development and living, waste management, environmental protection, biodiversity, protection of environmental and biological resources, sanitation, climate change. NEP particularly emphasized on training and sensitizing teacher educators and trainers around Sustainable Development and has made it mandatory environmental education as a part of the curriculum. NEP aims to provide education in a way that it shall provide and generate sustainable livelihoods and will boost the economy of the nation.^[8]

Before NEP also, the focus and efforts has been made in the area of promoting Sustainable Education through Education. Pacific Education for Sustainable Development Framework have already identified areas of priority in the field of formal education and teacher training to build their knowledge and understanding and to promote Sustainable Practices with special emphasis on promoting quality education.^[9]

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been a major area of the focus nationally and internationally. As NEP is introduced recently and there is still a long way to for the entire and effective implementation of the policy. Till then, the nation can keep following and implementing the good practices, put efforts how the NEP and ESD components can become an inbuilt part of the curriculum methodology and how it can be reached and applied in every educational institutions of India.

Obstacles to Education for Sustainable Development

Despite of the fact that, ESD has been a major focus of the national and international organization, but a very limited progress has been seen so far. There are many factors and reasons contributing to the lack of progress. The Author's real-time interactions with Global Schools Ambassadors and Advocates from United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSDN), who have worked implementing ESD in schools and communities, there are several critical barriers and challenges to Education for Sustainable Development in India, among few are mentioned below:

1. Lack of Awareness: During the personal interactions with Global Schools Advocates working at the grassroots level schools in rural India, it was found that there is a dire need to spread awareness about Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of Education behind achieving these goals. Even it has been more than six years, since SDGs have been announced, teacher community in the rural areas is still not aware of global goals. It is imperative for the educational community to be aware and realize how important is to restructure the entire education system and without reorientation of education achieving sustainability is not possible.

2. Practicing ESD in the Curriculum: It should be clear how ESD will be implemented in a uniform manner across the curriculum in schools both in rural and urban areas. The nation has to make sure that it is not just included in books and students are learning about the concepts of sustainable development and rote memorizing it. Practicing ESD in curriculum means, to act on ESD and not to cram the concept of ESD.

3. Simplifying the Concept of ESD: It is essential to simplify the concept of ESD. Many research and studies has shown that over the years, researchers and experts have tried to define sustainable development and its complexity. Complexity in the concept of

ESD will not help, one has to simplify it and convert it into small actions which the school community can comprehend and implement. Even the 17 SDGs goals are highly ambitious and therefore student community shall be made understand that how each and every small action can help towards achieving sustainability. And when everyone will be taking such small actions across the country and the globe, achieving sustainability is possible.

4. Community Participation to ESD: It is critical and important to see ESD from the local context. Without local participation, implementing the ESD Concept practically is impossible. The community members should know what ESD is, what activities are being conducted in schools, what their children are learning and how school is contributing towards the development of the community.

5. Lack of Shared Ownership, Collaboration and Strong Partnerships: No sector can say that they have nothing to do with sustainable development. Every department, whether public or private, is equally responsible towards ESD. The lack of cooperation between the ministries and departments of governments, weak links and partnerships between public and private sectors and lack of inclusion of Civil Society Organizations stops us from the effective implementation of ESD.

6. Lack of financial resources and materials: It is true that India is spending dedicated funds in the field of education but still there are areas which are not being focused in real. Investment in teachers training, creating material and resources, curriculum development and related materials need financial supports from both national and local levels. With financial constraints, it is challenging to promote sustainability with action and through education for a longer term.

Results, Discussions and Suggestions to Overcome Challenges and for Effective Implementation of ESD

1. Spreading Awareness: Spreading awareness about ESD shall be the first step. If people don't know what sustainability and education is what is the relationship between the two, it is impossible to move forward in the right direction.

2. Effective ESD Curriculum: The ESD Curriculum shall aim at developing right attitude, skills and behaviour among the school community and stakeholders. It should bring and promote behavioral change and it should be simple, precise and actionable in nature. Activities related to sustainability shall be inbuilt in the ESD curriculum.

3. Encouraging Community Participation: It is very important for the experts designing curriculum to consider the local context and relevancy. The School Management Committee in Schools should engage community members in their meetings and plans and there should be a particular focus on how local community can be involved in school activities and contribute towards sustainability.

4. Sustainability Forums: There is a need to for, restructure and use existing forums, platforms and committees to promote ESD in schools. The platforms such as Bal Sansad, Bal Sabha, Children Cabinet, School Management Committee etc. should encourage activities in with action throughout the year on sustainability. This will increase the involvement of all respective stakeholders such as children, teachers, parents and community members.

5. Networking, Partnerships and Collaborations: There is a need of strong collaboration between Government, Private Sector, Civil Society Organizations, Institutions, and all relevant stakeholders and to become as one Collective implementing ESD. This will build the capacity and will also support in addressing financial and resource constraints.

Conclusion

Education, no doubt, is a key to bring sustainable development and is a game changer tool. Education can bring required changes in the attitude, behaviour and skills among the school community who can become ultimate future problem solver and decision makers. If the schools, institutions, colleges can bring in theme of sustainability as a central part of the education in a practical manner, then this would be one of the greatest contributions to ESD. This paper attempted to examine what all studies and literatures have already been done in the field of ESD, good practices shared and what are still the critical barriers and obstacles to ESD and how to address those obstacles. The review article tries to elaborate actions and steps needed around sustainability and focuses on Education for Sustainable Development and not Education about Sustainable Development.

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