

Original Article

Sustainability in the Education Sector: The Social, Economic and Environmental Perspective

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Abstract - Education, the main source of knowledge, is very important in a technological and knowledge-based era of economic development. Education is an impetus to any country's development process, bringing reforms and changes in 'intellectual capital and technology, creating competition and innovation in the economy by flourishing human capital with expertise and skill. For any educational institute, it is imperative to create leaders for tomorrow and decision-makers who can commit to a sustainable future. The current research paper focuses on the need for adopting sustainable strategies in the education industry, especially at the higher level of education in India. The study intended to focus on different aspects of sustainable strategies and practices being used and adopted at the higher level of the education sector. The research highlights the need for innovative practices and learning programs to address sustainability in the education sector.

Keywords - Development, Education, Environment, Strategies, Sustainable.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is the most heard and talked about terminology these days. It implies focusing on the development in a way that meets the expectations and needs of the present generation without exasperating the needs of coming generations in the future. Our planet is continuously facing natural calamities, climatic changes, rapid changes in technology, and the depletion of natural resources, making the entire community need to focus on sustainable development. There are four main pillars of sustainable development, i.e., society or social, economic, environmental, and cultural. All four aspects focus on different dimensions of sustainable development. They are dependent on each other, and at the same time, they are also an integral part of sustainable development (UNESCO).

Sustainable development is a movement led by the world to make the earth a better place to live. Sustainability plays a pivotal role in changing and increasing the 'environmental,' 'economic,' and 'social performance' of individuals and businesses. (Chandran 2017). Sustainability has also become an inherent part of the education system of any country. In the education industry, sustainability implies engaging in economically feasible, socially acceptable, and environmentally friendly activities. A sustainable organization emphasizes these aspects in its educational curriculum, research, and innovation. Also, it prepares the next generation of students who can contribute to society and work to develop a healthy and green environment. The main priority areas for the education sector are 'cultural management,' 'teaching/learning,' 'research,' 'student development,' 'society sustainability,' and 'environmental protection and sustainability.

2. Literature Review

'Education for sustainable development (ESD) is the main need for society to resolve the challenges faced by the planet. Humans' various activities over time have brought changes to 'earth's ecosystems,' which are irreversible, and now human life is in danger. It is imperative to tackle environmental, economic, and social issues to solve the problem of global warming (UNESCO). ESD for the '2030 education program' is aimed at transformation at the personal level and societal level. Educational institutes must develop and implement procedures and policies that focus on sustainability, considering the major priority areas for development in the education system (UNESCO).

Mohanty, A. & Dash, D. (2018) studied a conceptual model of sustainability education in India. The study focuses on the three components of sustainable education- 'Profit,' 'People,' and 'Planet.' The study concludes that for achieving sustainable goals, it is essential to adopt sustainable education development to make the education system vigorous and progressive. In a research conducted by Madsen (2013), the researcher found the issues and problems related to the complexity of Education Sustainable Development (ESD) and how teachers face problems in teaching their students with the help of real-life examples.

Branden (2012) conducted a study to determine basic principles and strategic recommendations for effectiveness in education and learning. From the study, he concluded that institutes should follow some sustainable strategies for improvement and effectiveness like 'focusing on intrinsic motivation,' 'instructional improvements,' 'teamwork,' 'focusing on overall social, economic, and environmental factors.



A report by UNESCO (2018) supports that across the globe, in every country, 'Education Sustainable Development' (ESD) should be adopted to enhance the education system, improving environmental integrity and economic viability. 'Innovative Pedagogy' and 'Learning by doing' the teachers should use approaches.

Lotz-Sisitka, H. et al. (2015), in the study of 'transformative,' 'transgressive social learning' in times of 'systemic global dysfunction, the researchers concluded that schools and institutes need to follow new transformative and innovative learning styles through ESD strategies to promote social learning in the organization.

Kelley, C. and Dikkers, S. (2016) studied the "feedback for school improvement around distributed leadership" and emphasized that to enhance the basic unit of an institute, it is required to bring updation in the education system. This progressiveness will further enhance students' learning, teachers' performance, and school culture.

3. Methodology

The major objective of this study is to understand the social, economic, and environmental perspectives for sustainability in the education sector. So, along with the literature review study, the data is collected by interviewing the faculties to understand the various initiatives and actions undertaken by their institute for sustainable development. The detailed objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the leadership and the steps taken by the institutes to create a working, learning, and research culture.
- To study the various development programs conducted at the institute level, which help students and assist them in contributing towards a sustainable future.
- To know whether the faculties and students engage in research activities and set up research areas that impact sustainability globally.
- To know if the institute has a collaborative partnership culture that supports sustainability in the curriculum.
- To know if the organization's human resource policies are ethical for sustainability in the changing scenario.

The data is collected from 50 faculty members of the graduate and postgraduate colleges in the Pune region in India. The data is collected using the interview method. All the questions are closed-ended and discussion-based.

Interview Questions

1. Are you aware of the importance of implementing ESD in the classroom?
2. Does your institute have a collaborative partnership culture for sustainability?
3. What steps are taken by your institute to create a sustainable environment?
4. What programs are conducted by your institute that supports sustainability?
5. Are the current policies of your organization ethical and sustainable?

6. Suggest some practices your institute can follow to create a more sustainable environment.

4. Discussion

The study focuses on the various sustainable education programs covering formal, non-formal, and informal learning of the students and the faculties of the institute. The focus areas of discussion are the four main pillars of sustainability.

4.1. Social Sustainability

This aspect of sustainable development focuses on promoting human resources and unleashing their hidden potential that helps build social communities. All the actions lead to promoting human capital.

4.2. Economic Sustainability

Economic Sustainability ensures the economy's growth along with engaging and finding ways to save the natural environment and utilizing the resources in an optimum way. Various policies for economic development adopted by individual nations have a great impact on sustainable development.

4.3. Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is to preserve the degradation of the environment. It ensures measures to save the environment for generations to come and reverse the factors that cause degradation of the environment.

4.4. Cultural Sustainability

Every society has a unique culture and belief system. Cultural Sustainability focuses on preserving culture, values, beliefs, and heritage so they can be passed on to future generations. Sometimes cultural aspects are considered a part of social sustainability, but some consider culture a separate pillar for sustainable development.

The research highlights the strategies adopted by the institute for their sustainability rather than creating future leaders who can contribute to a sustainable future. The study shows that only a few institutes provide a safe and flexible working environment for their staff members and students. Although the faculties have to create expertise in students, most faculties feel that the institute hardly contributes towards supporting the teaching and learning programs.

Most Institutes do not recognize the importance of research by faculties and students that can contribute to environmental sustainability. Faculties feel that the faculty development programs should be organized regularly. Due to the changing scenario and increasing demand and supply gap between students and faculties, colleges hardly believe in creating transformational models and building global partnerships with other organizations. Some of the organization's plans, policies, and practices are unethical, ranging from the student's admission, tuition fees, staff remuneration, working environment, and HR policies. The attrition rate is increasing in the education sector, and there are hardly any efforts to retain and train efficient staff

members. From the interviews of the faculties, many interesting observations have come to light. Some major

observations and discussions with faculty members are presented in the word cloud.



Source: The authors

Fig. 1 Word Cloud - Data Analysis

5. Outlook

Every country around the globe prioritizes enhancing and improving the education system. For this, it is required to give more importance to sustainability and proper educational system development to be followed to have a robust and progressive system. The following are a few suggestions that can be followed to achieve sustainable development.

- Institutes should adopt innovative strategies and pedagogy to improve the education system.
- Institutes should motivate and retain highly skilled employees to provide enhanced learning to the students.
- Encouraging investment in research, technology, and higher education.
- The institutions can regularly organize training, workshops, and seminars to make the teachers highly competent.
- Providing equal opportunities to all.
- Arranging faculty development programs at regular intervals.

6. Conclusion

To achieve the levels of development and improve the education system, it is required to encourage investment in knowledge. The educational systems continue to procrastinate expectations at various levels. However, it needs to be upgraded and cannot be neglected. People have raised a demand for higher education and quality education. Institutes provide various sustainable education programs covering formal, non-formal and informal learning of the students and the faculties to make the system robust and progressive. Institutes should avoid unethical practices in their conduct and provide a safe environment for teachers and students. A proper Education Sustainable Development (ESD) should be adopted that plays a vital role in enhancing the education system, improving the environmental integrity and economic viability.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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