

Exploring Challenges to Sustainable Legal Development and Role of Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

Sustainability education aims to equip students, teachers and education systems with new knowledge and ways of thinking to achieve economic prosperity and preparing responsible citizenship and restoration of living system through education. The present day higher education institutions in Pakistan are increasingly attempting to address the economic, environmental and social challenges faced by the Pakistani society by equipping the students with quality knowledge, skills and values. Education for sustainable development has been one of the priorities of Pakistani higher education over the years to achieve these goals. A plethora of research exists on issues to sustainable development, however, little attention has been paid towards this issue specifically related to role of higher education and challenges to sustainable development in Pakistan. In this paper we analyze the major challenges to sustainable development and role of Pakistani higher education. This research enhances the understanding of teachers, policy makers and researchers about the critical challenges to sustainability education in Pakistan. Lastly, based on the review we suggest some solutions to overcome the challenges to the sustainable development and role of higher education in Pakistan.

Keywords: Sustainable development, challenges and issues, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is the process of developing knowledge, skills and values among students [1]. The main aim of sustainable development is to address the issues related to environment and social challenges of coming generations [2]. The importance of education for sustainable development is recognized all over the world. It is used as a tool to attain the goals of social development. The importance of sustainable development has been recognized by the United

Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development [3].

Pakistani higher education is undergoing fast changes due to many factors such as internationalization of education, quality control and above all increasing demands of sustainability development [4, 5]. Pakistan is striving hard to achieve the goals and standards of sustainable development through higher education. So far, different multifaceted approaches have been undertaken by the government of Pakistan to attain this aim such as chalking out development policies, reviewing previous policy goals and setting higher national developmental targets, introducing reforms in higher education through research and funding [6]. However, still there are many challenges to achieving the goals of sustainable development. Scholars [7, 8] have highlighted that there are sustainability issues involved in the process of education for sustainable development related to implementation and monitoring, research and development and evaluation. However, majority of the sustainability issues in front of the higher education are gender equality and equality, health issues, environmental issues such as water, climate, biodiversity and disaster management, peace and human development, ministry of education in Pakistan has realized this and is serious that by the coming years, the higher education would be able to assimilate and resolve these issues [9]. Recent researchers [10] have directed attention towards solving these issues through patronizing the efforts of higher education that includes widening access to quality and affordable education, crime prevention through police reforms, fighting corruption through expediting judicial processes and bringing about transparency in cases adjudications, raising standards of life by providing basic necessities of life such food, health and shelter, basic health services and improved transportation.

In recent years, higher education of Pakistan has prioritized education for sustainable development endeavors. The initiatives have been integrated into the curriculum of higher education across the country [11]. Researchers [7] have suggested that integration of sustainable development concepts into the higher education curriculum is one of the ways to increase the effectiveness of education for sustainable development. Over the years, the Pakistani higher educational institutions have focused the development of skills among graduates to meet the needs of competitive employment [12]. However, along with the need of sustainable education, there are many challenges faced by the higher education institutions regarding sustaining and promoting the goals of development. Among many challenges, following are the two immediate challenges faced by the higher educational institution. First, it is difficult to clearly determine the characteristics of sustainability curriculum in higher education. Second, it is also challenging to guide the process of sustainability orientation curriculum design [13].

Research [5] has indicated that the major issues related to sustainable education curriculum are managing the curriculum structure. In the context of Pakistan, the issues of sustainable education at higher education level have already been emphasized and efforts are underway to improve the performance of the higher education institutions. The major emphasis is on the management of the higher education institutions to identify the issues and suggest best possible solutions [14]. Studies [7, 15] have suggested that the Pakistani higher education institutions need to identify the complexity of sustainability issues for enabling the interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary learning of sustainability. For coping with the issues of sustainability at higher education level, there is a need to integrate technology based and flexibility in the sustainability curriculum. Some of the challenges of sustainability education faced by higher education are the issues of contextualization of curriculum, balancing up the theory with practice and also providing some space for reflection as important elements of teaching and learning. The general perception is that the current higher education institutions are following the traditional teaching and learning strategies which negate the principle of active learning [7]. The main aim of this review was to analyze the major challenges to sustainable development in Pakistan and the role of higher education institutions. In this paper we provide some suggestions how to enhance the efforts for sustainable education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this research study we attempted to;

- To examine challenges to sustainable legal development and the role of higher education in dealing with these challenges in Pakistan?
- To suggest solutions for the promotion of sustainable legal development in Pakistan and role of higher education?

METHOD

To investigate the above mentioned research questions, in this paper we adopted a Meta analytical review technique [16] and investigated a wide area of literature on sustainable development. We also investigated the existing literature on role of higher education in Pakistan for sustainable development. Due to dearth of research and insufficient literature on this issue in the context of Pakistan, our major focus remained on literature from international context. For this purpose, an extensive research on sustainability education around the world was consulted. On the basis of literature exploration, the review was critically discussed in major themes such as sustainable development, higher education and sustainable development, challenges to sustainable development, essentials for sustainable development, recommendations and conclusion.

SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT: OVERVIEW

Education for sustainable development is universally recognized in the current times to achieve the goals of sustainable development. The importance of this can be seen from the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development from 2004 to 2014 [17]. Researchers advised that integration of sustainable development in higher education is the most effective way for increasing the effectiveness of education for sustainable development [18, 19]. Recently, efforts are underway in the Pakistani higher education to maximize the effects of education for sustainable development through higher education. However, it is important for policy makers and implementers to monitor and assess the challenges faced by the higher education and the progress made related to sustainability endeavors. There is a need to further evaluate the achievements of higher education curriculum towards the education for sustainable development. This paper aims to review the challenges faced by higher education of Pakistani regarding education for sustainable development.

The curriculum of higher education mainly focuses on knowledge transference, skills development,

contextualization and internationalization of educational opportunities and maintaining balance between theory and practice as the major academic goals. The teaching methods are narrowing on authentic learning experiences, provides space for critical reflection, collective learning and research[5, 20].

In the last decades, environmental issues have sent alarms around the world. This has attracted the researchers and education providers especially towards sustainable development. Education for sustainability has been widely recognized as the best way to achieve the goals of sustainable education. This can also be seen by the efforts adopted by the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the promotion of activities for education for sustainable development around the world especially in Asia[21]. According to UNO, the goal of education for sustainable development is to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development in all aspects of education and learning around the world. Largely speaking, the concept of sustainable development aims to develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviour of people to enable them to take care of the mother earth and environmental concerns[22]. Currently, apart from promoting the goals of environmental protection, education for sustainable development is gaining broad attention and focus among social and economic experts as an expanded concept[23].

Education for sustainable development consists of ten themes such as globalization, trade and development, poverty alleviation, sustainable consumptions and production, social equity, gender perspectives and cultural consciousness[24]. It is argued that the aim of education for sustainable development should not be confined to education about sustainable development only. Rather, it should be about education for sustainable development[25]. Based on review, we suggest that Pakistani higher education must recognize and integrate this prospective in their curriculum goals. In the education for sustainable development students are taught about the issues of sustainable development. Because, it is believed that widely education for sustainable development stresses on quality of learning by introducing creative, reflexive and participatory processes in education.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT

Education is the key to achieve the goals of sustainable development(Hopkins & McKeown, 2002). United Nation also stresses on quality education as a tool to achieve the targets of sustainable education. Education changes the attitudes of people which

ultimately lead to behaviour changes[26]. We understand that there is a need in the Pakistani higher education to reorient its existing education system with the goals of sustainable development. Despite the increasing needs of sustainable development in the country, still the impact of education for development in all sectors of the higher education and needs to be integrated and prioritized.

Researchers [26-28]have stressed on the higher educational institutions to focus the issues of environmental and sustainability. In this regard one of the emerging challenges is planning and creating long term collaborations between public and private higher education institutions. Another greater issue is the pedagogical shift from sustainability literacy. Writers [29]argue that higher education institutions need to guide students enrolled in the higher institutions to develop their competencies to critically understand and apply the principles of sustainable development in their lives. The reason is that the future workforce must have the ability to have a direct impact on the environment. The higher education ofPakistanmay prioritize the students' crucial role in implementing the practical solutions for sustainable development. We suggestthatto achieve this aim, students need to be trained for understanding the problems of sustainability development so that they could become change agents.

CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT

The role of higher education in sustainable development is underscored and accepted all over the world[30]. Research has already highlighted that to achieve the goals of development in today's highly fast world, it is important to identify sustainability issues. In this regard, the role of higher education is crucial,because, higher education is a key to bring about the much desired change among the graduates by preparing them for the higher competitive job market[31]. For this purpose, the curriculum of higher education should focus development of professional thinking and skills among the graduates to enable them to cope with the fast changing trends in the market. It is believed that for moving the society towards sustainability, it is mandatory to incorporate the concept of sustainability in the higher education professional programs[32]. One of the challenges to higher education in the area of sustainable development is lack of training for the higher education professionals such as management, administration and academic staff. This gap has created problems for the professionals to understand the trends and changes that occur rapidly due to expansions of education and population around the world as well as in Pakistan. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of skilled labour and

professionals from which demands new solutions. The existing professionals must have the skills and knowledge to cope with this situation. This necessitates training of professionals to think creatively to cope with the sustainability concerns.

Another challenge to sustainable development is that the curriculum of higher education is structured on traditional grounds. The system is focused more on theory than practice. It promotes such educational practice that does not promote sustainable development in the country. Writers [33] have indicated that the issues of sustainable development could be solved through by shifting the curriculum from traditional to modern sustainable development paradigm. For this purpose, different programs and practices in higher education must be reformed so that future graduates have not only the opportunity to get knowledge but also have chance to get intellectual development such as higher level cognitive and critical thinking skills to be able to present solutions to the highly complex technical problems of the fast modernized and emerging societies. The students coming out of the higher education institutions must not only get information about 'what is', rather, they should be able to take action on the new information and make the leap from 'I know' to 'I care' and 'I will do something' [30].

The existing curriculum of higher education of Pakistan is overcrowded. The teaching methods and the designs of teaching and learning are passive. It is argued that to promote the goals of sustainable development, the Pakistani learners should not only get new knowledge about the issues but they should also be able to think critically on different issues facing the society and nation [34]. The higher education institutions should provide new ways to the learners to enable them to deeply think about the sustainable development issues in their lives and in the context of everyday decision-making [35].

The UNESCO has suggested that the developing countries must include sustainable development concerns and goals in their curriculum [36]. Pakistani higher education also needs to integrate these goals in its curriculum. For this purpose, there is a need for a shift from integrating theory to reviewing, incorporating, monitoring and evaluating the progress of sustainable development through higher education. It is suggested that to achieve this goal, there is need to integrate the concepts of sustainable development into the existing curriculum of higher education and developing a highly effective mechanism for monitoring and assessment framework [37]. Therefore, it is essential that the existing sustainability curriculum models of higher education in Pakistan need to be assessed and

evaluated. This will help in gathering key characteristics of the successful sustainability curriculums around the world and incorporate them into the Pakistan higher education system keeping in view the local needs and requirements.

To do this change, there is a need to overview the existing measures and programs for sustainable development and identify those characteristics which can be suitably incorporated in the existing programs [38]. For this purpose, there is need to develop guidelines for developing, monitoring, assessing framework for effective evaluation of the weaknesses and progress of the existing curriculum towards education for sustainable development and recommend new ways for effective implementation of the existing programs in higher education for sustainable development [39].

ESSENTIALS FOR SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT

The goals of sustainability education can be promoted through different ways and means. For achieving these goals in higher education, research has already identified essential elements of sustainability curriculum which are: mission, content, teaching methods, core competencies for graduates and assessment criteria [40]. Several ways to promote sustainability education have been presented in the literature. These help in successful integration of educational for sustainable development [41]. It is suggested that the curriculum should have flexibility and permissibility to allow different cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary processes and approaches. It is necessary that experts in higher education must include complexity of knowledge into the curriculum from various sources and disciplines. This will help in preparing the graduates for their diverse roles in the society as active members of the society. At the same time it is also necessary to include issues related to sustainability in the curriculum of higher education [24, 42]. The issues should be contextualized as well as be connected with global contexts. This will help train and educate the students towards the needs of the society and their roles in it as responsible and future oriented citizens. This helps them to take right decisions for the right cause [43]. In higher education, it is essential to create balance among social, environmental and economic aspects of educational system for achieving the goals of sustainable development. Hence, it is important for the universities in Pakistan to focus on curriculum and research works to enable the graduates to promote the relationship among all aspects of sustainable development. For this purpose, it is advisable that the managers of higher education should include all

practical elements of sustainable development in the curriculum of higher education. Furthermore, it is also important that the theoretical aspects of sustainable education should be connected with practice.

Teachers and researchers of higher education must accept students as an agent of construction of knowledge. Hence, they should consider all aspects of sustainable education such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Thus it is advisable that teachers at higher education must use various teaching methods which are suitable for the needs of different disciplines and students for facilitating environmental learning in local as well as global perspectives[44]. For this purpose, it is necessary that instructors must provide students time for critical reflections and involve them in academic decisions and evaluations. This will provide students with valuable learning opportunities or experiences. Another important element of sustainability education is enabling students to understand local and global issues in national perspectives. For this purpose, higher education should include virtual classes for creating connections between local classrooms and global scenarios. This must be seen in the perspective of pedagogical innovations for contributing towards the paradigm shift from traditional education to sustainable educational practices[45]. For this purpose, it is necessary that the transformative potential of sustainable education must be highlighted that affects classroom practices at higher education institutional policy level for changing the attitudes of participants[45].

There is a need to build campus sustainability networks. For this purpose, there must be positive interaction and mutual learning among diverse disciplines. This will help in developing innovations in teaching and learning process[46, 47]. Mutual learning allows the students and teachers to learn about sustainability principles from one another. The campus collaboration among various disciplines is crucial to deal with sustainability issues. Through mutual learning students will develop the understanding about complexity of issues[31]. The teaching methods of higher education should also be geared towards the needs of sustainable development. For this purpose, the educators must create wider interactions between academics and students in the learning process. To achieve this goal, virtual communications can be promoted to learn from global experiences in sustainable development. This can be done by providing students chances to have access to emails, course sites, live chat rooms and video conferences to communicate with participants beyond the regions and discuss the sustainable cases. This will expose the

students to explore appropriate solutions to national and regional issues[48].

Teachers and management of higher education must adopt academic measures that could facilitate to achieve high scale sustainability solutions to problems in the society. The better approach in this regard would be to promote shared learning. It focuses on creating opportunities for students from different backgrounds to work out effective sustainability solutions to problems faced by developing societies in the current times[49]. Shared learning is learner centered education approach. It can be incorporated in the curriculum of higher education where students and instructors shall have equal chances to do and learn together. This approach extends the potentials of students to have deeper understanding of the issues of sustainability. This also improves the metacognitive skills among students which enable them to think deeply and create connections between theory and practices in sustainability education[50, 51].

Another better teaching and learning approach that can be used to promote education for sustainable development is project based learning. Higher education practitioners must use project based approach to enable students to explore and discuss the sustainability issues. Students better understand the issues of sustainability when they are engaged in real life experiences and projects. This method also prompts students to reflect on their preconceived notions, beliefs and changing attitudes towards sustainability issues[52, 53]. It also increases research skills of students to identify the environmental issues. Education for sustainable development is necessary to solve problems of Pakistan society in a fast changing world. For this purpose, higher education institutions must along with promotion of knowledge should also prioritize the complex problems of national life and future. This can be achieved by stressing on quality of learning at higher education teaching and learning in Pakistan. For quality of learning, the processes of creative reflection, reflexivity are essential. Hence, higher education for sustainable development must emphasize on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. For this purpose for promoting the goals of sustainable development, there is a need to focus on four elements such as complexity of knowledge, flexibility at permeable discipline level, contextualization, consistency of theory with practice and prospective orientation[54, 55].

Based on the sustainable development literature we argue that the curriculum of higher education in Pakistan needs to enable students to explain the dynamic and reality aspects of different disciplines. This should lead students to analyze the

causes and effects of existing sustainability issues. On the other side, there should be critical discussions on different social issues, goals of economic development and ecological balance for achieving sustainable development. It must be known to the managers of higher education that the complex sustainability issues are constantly changing. Therefore, there must be flexibility in the educational approaches at higher education to keep adjust the scope of knowledge at different discipline levels. Separation of disciplines may create a mismatch between knowledge and the needs for responding to the sustainability issues. Hence, utilizations of multiple disciplinary approaches to deal with sustainability issues is important for gaining different perspectives and resolve complex sustainable issues. There must be openness in the higher education approaches towards integration and its utilization to deal with sustainability issues in a fast changing Pakistan society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above mentioned review the following recommendations are forwarded for promotion of education for sustainable development through higher education initiatives.

1. Pakistan universities need to collectively move towards integrating sustainability in its pedagogical practices. This may be done at all levels and programs of higher education.
2. Pakistan government needs to organize more and more sustainability related literacy all over the country.
3. There needs to be training for teachers and administration of higher education institutions for promoting the efforts of sustainability education. This will increase greater ecological awareness among the young generation.
4. There is a need to review and improve the sustainability content in all graduate and post-graduate programs.
5. Sustainability education should be incorporated in all types of course works provided to students at higher education level.
6. The non-technical courses need to be integrated with larger sustainability content such as philosophy, economics, ecology, cultural and sociology of sustainability.
7. Sustainability related research needs to be encouraged at all levels of higher education courses.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above mentioned review, it can be concluded that education for sustainable

development is highly important for national development. There is a critical need to address different types of challenges faced by the Pakistani higher education institutions. The most effective ways of solving the issues and challenges of sustainability education is incorporating the sustainability aspects in the curriculum of higher education. The teaching methods and innovations needs to be changed for bringing about a paradigm shift in Pakistani higher education for promotion of sustainable development. For this purpose, innovative teaching methods such as authentic learning experiences, reflections, mutual learning, shared learning and research must be applied in teaching for sustainability. The higher education institutes can achieve the goals of sustainable development by improving their monitoring and evaluation practices. There is a need to develop a proper monitoring and assessment framework for facilitating the activities for sustainable development.

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