

Available online @ www.iaraindia.com
RESEARCH EXPLORER - A Blind Review & Refereed Quarterly International Journal
ISSN: 2250-1940 (P) 2349-1647 (O)
Impact Factor: 3.655(CIF), 2.78(IRJIF), 2.77(NAAS)
Volume XIII, Issue 45
October - December 2024
Formally UGC Approved Journal (63185), © Author

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN INDIA

Dr. MARADON DRISON

Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting & Finance
S.A. College of Arts & Science, Chennai

S. SUSIDHARAN

Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting & Finance
S.A. College of Arts & Science, Chennai

Abstract

The most important way to make our planet environment-friendly is through Education, which is necessary for all. Sustainable development has become very important in daily life, without practicing it, we cannot make changes to make the world more economical, social, and environmentally friendly. India is now one of the most important countries in the world for its hasty progress. The sustainable development policy balances opposing elements such as economic growth and climate change. SDG 4 emphasizes the importance of providing inclusive and equitable quality education. The National Education Policy (2020) has placed particular emphasis on SDG 4 to guarantee quality education across the country. It is essential to recognize that education is the foundation of sustainable development, and merely discussing the concept of 'Sustainable Development' in schools and institutions will not lead to progress. We must all take action, not individually, but collectively. This article focuses on the role of quality education in higher education to achieve the goals of sustainable development and also emphasizes the importance of quality education in promoting sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Environmentally Friendly, National Education Policy, Quality Education.

Introduction

Literacy and education are key pillars that shape a society's cultural identity and are critical for a nation's socioeconomic progress. They enhance individual potential and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce, which is essential for driving economic growth, innovation, and overall societal well-being. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 goals aimed at addressing a wide range of global challenges. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on issues

like quality education, poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental sustainability, and global peace, with the overarching aim of creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable world by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were officially implemented in January 2016 and are set to guide global development efforts over the next fifteen years. Goal 4 of this agenda, which focuses on Quality Education, emphasizes the provision of equitable education promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This agenda underscores the necessity of shifting fundamental perspectives, recognizing the

dynamic interconnections between economic, social, and environmental dimensions, thereby driving integrated and sustainable development across all nations. The education is often regarded as one of the most powerful tools for self-reliance and development. However, the focus of this paper is on how quality education contributes to individual development, which, in turn, influences the overall growth and prosperity of a country. The argument here is that without the upliftment of individuals, a nation cannot truly flourish. The paper seeks to examine the extent to which education is accessible to all students, whether some sections of society benefit disproportionately while others remain excluded, and whether the education provided today aligns with the standards proposed under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We must all take action, not individually, but collectively.

Review of Literature

Leder and Bharucha (2015) This paper examines the application of Basil Bernstein's pedagogical theory in teaching the concept of water in geography classrooms at English-medium schools in Pune. It highlights the shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to more participatory, student-focused approaches, in line with the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). The study identifies challenges such as outdated teaching methods, teacher competency, large class sizes, and curriculum relevance. It concludes that for education for sustainable development to be effective, there needs to be a focus on student participation, modernized teaching practices, and a curriculum that equips students with practical sustainability skills and values.

Fulford (2016) The analysis of returns to education in India revealed that individuals with more years of education experienced higher per capita consumption, with each additional year of education increasing consumption by about 4 percent. However, this effect was not observed for females. The study also found that the average returns to education were lower for women compared to men, primarily due to the underutilization of female workers in the production process.

Sen and Cekerol (2018) The development of open universities in Turkey has been recognized for offering affordable, high-quality education to a large number of

students, with program diversity playing a key role in increasing enrollment. Cekerol (2018) highlighted the importance of distance education in Turkey, despite challenges like quotas and organizational issues. In Nigeria, Cherechi (2018) identified the need for policy reforms in teacher education to address 21st-century challenges. These studies reflect ongoing educational transformations worldwide.

Moyo et. al. (2018) This study investigates the role that teacher education (TE) can play in fostering a culture of technology design, innovation, and digital literacy as essential drivers of Africa's socioeconomic transformation. The analysis revealed that TE institutions face significant challenges in integrating techno-digital teaching methods, often relying on traditional, chalk-and-talk approaches that set an outdated precedent. Using the qualitative "analytical model of constant comparison" for data collection and analysis, the study concluded that if TE institutions incorporate technology-focused courses into their curricula, graduates are more likely to promote and nurture a sustainable scientific culture in schools. This, in turn, would benefit both immediate educational outcomes and long-term socioeconomic development.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the crucial role of education in fostering sustainable development in India, focusing on how education and sustainable development are interconnected. It will explore how various aspects of education—such as curriculum, teaching methods, and access—contribute to the broader goals of sustainability.

Significance of the Study

Education plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of economies by fostering skilled labor, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and combating poverty. The integration of sustainability into education depends on innovation and government support. As sustainability has become an urgent issue in contemporary society, various academic fields have started revising their curricula to include sustainable development, extending beyond just specialized sustainability courses. According to UNESCO (2020), education is key to creating a more sustainable future for all. To ensure students grasp the interconnectedness of environmental,

social, and economic systems, it is essential to embed sustainability into all areas of study (Gamage, 2022). Education must provide students with the knowledge, skills, and ethical values necessary to understand and responsibly address global challenges. However, despite the growing need, sustainable development is still not widely reflected in teaching practices. A study in the *Journal of Cleaner Production* highlights that sustainable development is often missing from higher education practices and materials. As a result, educators must take a more active role in incorporating sustainability into all subject areas.

Research Methodology

This study is primarily based on secondary data, which serves as the foundation for the analytical approach used to achieve the research objectives. The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature, relying on information gathered from prior studies and authoritative books and journals focused on 21st-century education in India and sustainable development. The study is theoretical, and content analysis is the main method employed. Additionally, the researcher gathered data from a range of sources, such as books, primary census data, research abstracts, academic journals, publications by renowned authors, and reputable academic websites.

National Education Policy 2020 and Sustainable Development

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the importance of incorporating sustainability principles across all levels of education and underscores the role of schooling in promoting sustainable development. The policy includes several provisions designed to integrate sustainability into the education system, recognizing it as a key priority for the future of education in India. The NEP highlights the need to embed environmental education throughout all stages of learning, from primary to higher education. This includes raising awareness of environmental issues, encouraging sustainable practices, and fostering the skills essential for advancing sustainable development. The policy acknowledges the essential role of educators in advancing sustainable development within education. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating sustainability into teacher preparation courses and encourages learning through practical, hands-on experiences. This

includes real-world experiential learning to develop the skills and attitudes needed to support sustainability. Additionally, the policy promotes technical education and skill development programs that are suited to local contexts, fostering sustainable livelihoods and income opportunities. The use of technology in education to enhance awareness and promote sustainable behavior. It recognizes technology's potential to drive sustainable development. The policy includes provisions that support environmental conservation and education for sustainable development, covering areas such as instruction, hands-on learning, career education, teacher training, and the application of sustainability through technology. By integrating sustainable practices across all levels, the NEP aims to create a more inclusive and sustainable educational system that equips students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed for long-term progress.

Challenges to the Advancement of Sustainable Education in India

There is a general lack of awareness about sustainable development and its principles among the wider public, including educators, parents, and students, which hinders the advancement of sustainable development education. Many schools and educational institutions in India are also inadequately equipped, with insufficient access to essential resources such as quality laboratories, libraries, and teaching facilities. Additionally, the significant financial investment required to develop and implement sustainable development education initiatives is often unavailable, as the education system faces persistent funding shortages. This creates substantial challenges in incorporating sustainable development into the educational framework. In India, significant socioeconomic disparities hinder access to quality education for sustainable development, particularly in underprivileged areas. As a result, there are challenges in providing high-quality educational resources that foster sustainable growth in these regions. Furthermore, India's educational system largely prioritizes traditional subjects such as science, mathematics, and language, with limited emphasis on sustainable development. This makes it difficult to incorporate sustainability concepts into the curriculum. Additionally, key stakeholders such as

policymakers, educators, and parents, who are accustomed to conventional educational structures, often resist embracing new ideas.

Recommendations

Public awareness campaigns play a critical role in highlighting the importance of sustainable development and creating a demand for education focused on sustainability. Teachers are central to driving sustainable progress in education, making it essential to equip them with the necessary training and skills to effectively teach sustainable development concepts. Implementing education for sustainable development (ESD) requires significant financial investment to design and execute relevant programs, underscoring the need for adequate funding for initiatives that promote sustainability within the education sector. Sustainability principles should be integrated into the curricula across all academic disciplines and educational levels, with a particular emphasis on project-based and experiential learning. Infrastructural support, including well-equipped classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, is essential to facilitate effective ESD. To ensure broad-based support and successful implementation, it is vital to involve policymakers, educators, parents, and community stakeholders in the development and execution of ESD programs. Additionally, fostering research and development will help identify effective approaches and models for the integration of sustainability in education. Special attention should be given to underprivileged communities, including rural and marginalized populations, ensuring they have access to high-quality education and the necessary resources for ESD.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of NEP 2020 necessitates overcoming substantial resource constraints. To address this challenge, it is imperative to explore innovative financing mechanisms that extend beyond traditional government funding. Public-private partnerships, along with alternative models such as social impact bonds, present promising avenues for securing the required resources. Quality education plays a crucial role in addressing sustainability challenges. As a youthful nation, India has the opportunity to empower its young population by creating more opportunities and providing access to quality education. This can instill a sense of

responsibility, raise awareness, and equip individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle sustainability issues. Essentially, it is about leveraging the demographic dividend. India's education system has increasingly aligned itself with the goals of sustainable development. The government's commitment to achieving SDG-4 is reflected in the design of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which incorporates the principles of sustainable development to promote and advance sustainability efforts, fostering the holistic development of the nation.

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