

Increasing Sustainability in Social Environment by using Education as a Tool for Enhancing Competencies in Higher Education

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Abstract

The term “sustainable development” became prominent after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 which prioritised global environmental discussions and improved upon the initial framework introduced at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm in 1972. “Development which meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (UN, 1989). Sustainability is the key word in every aspect of human development. Education is one such aspect which forms the basis of growth and development of human kind. In the context of higher institutions, many universities have signed international declarations and have committed to embed sustainability within their operations, outreach, education and research. However, despite the declaration of good intentions and policy developments at the national, regional and international level, little has been achieved in terms of embedding education for sustainable development holistically in the curriculum. The aim of this paper is to explore the views of educationists and students in relation to the competencies of education for sustainable development. The views obtained from the educationists and students indicate the need of strengthening the value system in order to use education as an instrument for sustainable development. This paper provides the theoretical framework for making embedding value system in the curriculum of higher education and setting it up as a priority.

Key Words: Higher Education, Education for sustainable development, Value Education, Curriculum

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development and sustainability is difficult to define and complicated to understand in terms of workability as it is also continually evolving. One of the original descriptions of sustainable development is credited to the Brundtland Commission: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their

own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p 43).

In order to understand Sustainable development it is important to understand that it generally depends upon three components: environment, society, and economy. The well-being of these three areas is intertwined, not separate. And in this intertwining of three components education plays an important tool as it is essential for sustainability. The current global trends are not sustainable and

education, public and training are key to moving the society towards sustainability.

The role of higher education is vital in sustainable development. There are many reports mentions that higher education institutions have stepped up their efforts to support sustainable development, have made significant efforts to address sustainability in campus operations (commonly referred to as campus greening), have introduced new programmes and courses related to education for sustainable development, and are extending the value and impact of their teaching and research to their respective communities.

However there are many challenges faced by higher education

- Lack of funds available to make sustainability a drive in the campus
- the lack of a coordinated approach and lack of awareness at all the levels of the institution to implement the necessary changes;
- insufficient staff development activities to empower staff to transform curricula and pedagogy towards a sustainable development perspective; and
- the persistence of disciplinary boundaries that inhibit the potential to address complex sustainable development issues

Research design

Qualitative data was collected via ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews of the total of ten educationists of higher education and 20 students of higher education from different background. The selection of teachers and students was

purposive and was delimited to the teachers and students of Lucknow city. The data collected was accurately recorded. The basis of data analysis was Content Analysis which included Definition analysis, Process analysis, Conceptual Analysis, Psychological Analysis, Reflective Analysis, Constructive analysis.

Researcher also tried to attempt to achieve the balance between perceived importance and actual importance of the study. In order to maintain the objectivity of the research following faculty of mind were put into the practice:

- Empathy and insight
- Inductive analysis and creative analysis
- Reflexivity of thoughts
- Instrumental utility (Usefulness of the research)
- Holistic Description

The analysis of data was purely based on following research question was the driver for the overall study:

How do teachers and students perceive and respond to the importance of Education for increasing the sustainability in social environment?

Data collection

- Teachers and students in the study were interviewed individually on one occasion for a period of 25–30 minutes, face to face, using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. Prolonged, in-depth conversation provided rich data. The semi-structured nature of questions also allowed the interviewer to modify questions as she

went along. Field notes were written up over the duration of the study; these described and reflected upon lessons observed.

- The questions asked were what sustainability meant to the teachers and students? How have they have been able to built up their knowledge/perceptions of increasing sustainability of using education in social environment? What are the sources of these perceptions? How do they feel about the education increases sustainability in social environment? What do they thought on n the 'issues' they encounter using education as a tool of increasing sustainability in social environment? And how and with what pedagogy the students develop best in them the value of sustainable development?

Findings

The outcome of this exploratory study shows the need to elaborate on specify the levels of concretion of the policies and framework of using education as a tool of increasing sustainability. The views of educationists and students can be concluded on the following points:

- The development of teaching and learning processes and evaluation strategies towards the improvement of Education for Sustainable development learning is an essential step to contribute to better teaching at the university level.
- Future research needs to develop evaluation tools that can provide information on student competence

mobilization in a context close to their professional practice. This would enable the exploration of competencies of students and teachers and the opportunities and challenges they face when trying to understand and promote sustainable development concept.

- Interdisciplinary work and practice, critical thinking, creativity, values clarification, management of emotions, social interaction and teamwork need to be enhanced through education studies to integrate it in the curriculum

- Envisioning alternative future scenarios and developing future-thinking competency amongst students promotes the challenging of existing worldviews, fosters responsibility and commitment and leads to innovation and action strategies for change.

The crucial role of higher education as the highly advanced and comprehensive knowledge provider is to find out the best way to bring about harmony and synthesis among the three pillars of sustainable development; economic, environmental, and social tasks and issues, which are often in conflict with each other. Institutions of higher education are not just simple provider of advanced knowledge and technology, but should be deliberating, and searching for the holistic view and concept of sustainable development and the necessary strategy and action plan. Educational program of universities in terms of curriculum of general and professional education should be innovated and improved in order to sensitize students of sustainable development.

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