

THE ROLE OF QUALITY EDUCATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Education plays a vital role in the transformation in terms of changing attitude, behavior, and life styles. The role of quality education with respect to that of Sustainable Development is indispensable. According to U.N. Commission (known as Brundtland Commission) Sustainable Development is “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generation.” Sustainable Development talks about environmental problems and its solution in a wider perspective. The recent trend in the depletion of natural resources, energy, water and food crises, has increased and challenged the role of higher education institutions. The present paper gives an overview regarding the role of quality education towards sustainable development.

Keywords: **Sustainable Development, Quality Education**

“Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, and tolerant societies.”

— Ban Ki-moon, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

INTRODUCTION

There is growing concern about the state of the environment all around the world. Environmental issues, such as rapidly increasing global warming, ozone depletion, dwindling resources, famine, disease, loss of the world’s forests, pollution, have captured the attention of the world. The recent depletion in natural resources has put the survival of humanity at risk. If we use up all the resources, what will the future generations do? The World Commission on Environmental Development (WCED) introduced the idea of sustainable development.

According to WCED “Sustainable Development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present generations, without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations.” (WCED, 1987, cited in Alvi & Aziz, p.5).

The UN Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, has recognized the importance of training on environment and sustainable development.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, also confirms this in Agenda 21. The agenda 21 states, **“Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address sustainable issues.”(UNESCO-UNEP, 1994).**

Education is critical agent of transformation in terms of changing life styles, attitude and behavior. The role of education in pursuit of Sustainable Development is indispensable. Sustainable Development talks about environmental problems and its solution in a broader perspective. It takes into account social, political, cultural and economic aspects. In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly declared the period from 2005 to 2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). DESD dreams and envisions a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education, and learn the values, behavior and lifestyles essential for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation. Hence, if different communities and nations hope to achieve sustainability goals, basic education must be reoriented to integrate ESD at all the stages of education—pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary and advanced—and within all forms of the existing educational set-up, i.e. formal and otherwise. (Gupta, 2007).

QUALITY EDUCATION

The meaning of a "Quality Education" is one that is pedagogically and developmentally sound and educates the student in becoming an active and productive members of society. A Quality Education is not one that is measured purely by a test score or by how many words per minute a 5-year-old can read. To hark back to these simplified measurements is to do a disservice to both the student and the phrase Quality Education itself.(www.unicef.org)

It is recognised that quality education is not only about access to education, but it also requires a reorientation of the education system that provides the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which respond to individual, national and global needs and expectations. Quality education encourages the development of critical thinking which fosters the desire and capacity for lifelong learning. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is simply good quality education which is about what and how people learn and its relevance to today's world and its global, environmental and social challenges. ESD has spread across all levels and areas of education, in all regions of the world, and is widely considered key in supporting sustainable development. International and national strategies dealing with the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development are beginning to reflect ESD as a crucial component.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development is a pattern of using natural resources in such a way which provides regular individual requirements considering the preservation of the environment for coming generations. After Brundtland Report sustainable development was defined as "Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" . After Rio Earth Summit 1992, the role of education to avoid the ecological degradation was accepted as a result of Rio Declaration on Environment and development.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

Education for Sustainable Development is an idea of education which aims to empower the individuals to assume liability to build a sustainable future. The thought of sustainable development touches aspects of the institutional and social framework. There has been increasing identification of the significant role of education in promoting sustainable development since 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. However, any individuals or organizations do not have all the knowledge to develop learning systems which are essential to maintain sustainable development in the specific surroundings.

Four major thrusts of ESD

1. Improving access and retention in quality basic education
2. Reorienting existing educational programmes to address sustainability
3. Increasing public understanding and awareness of sustainability
4. Providing training to advance sustainability across all sectors

Seven strategies for ESD

1. Vision-building and advocacy
2. Consultation and ownership
3. Partnership and networks
4. Capacity-building and training
5. Research and innovation
6. Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
7. Monitoring and evaluation

Source: UNESCO (2005a).

Sustainable Development Education Panel Report, 1998

"ESD is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and the quality of life of generations to come ... ESD enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future."

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CURRICULUM

Effective curriculum reform include:

- Review of the existing ESD component within the education system;
- Design of concrete plans to mobilise financial and human resources to support curriculum reorientation;
- Establishment of appropriate mechanisms to review current curriculum for integration of ESD in all subject areas;
- Refreshment and enhancement/creation of the ESD component within the curriculum from early childhood to tertiary education institutions;
- Assumption of an integrated approach which involves cross-curricular strategies, for example the use of themes, as well as project work and local investigations employing knowledge and skills from various subjects to address the same issue;
- Infusion of ESD into existing curriculum subjects and programmes;
- Production of new curriculum instructional guides for educators;
- Reorientation of education so that everyone have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower him or her to contribute to sustainable development and strengthen education and learning in all agendas.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN ESD

Pedagogy in ESD requires a shift towards active, participative, and experiential learning methods that engage the learner and make a real difference to their understanding, thinking and ability to act. Few pedagogic approach in ESD includes the following:

- 1. Critical reflection** – including the more traditional lecture, but also newer approaches such as reflexive accounts, learning journals, and discussion groups.
- 2. Systemic thinking and analysis** – the use of real-world case studies and critical incidents, project-based learning, stimulus activities, and the use of the campus as a learning resource.
- 3. Participatory learning** – with emphasis on group or peer learning, developing dialogue, experiential learning, action research/learning to act, and developing case studies with local community groups and business
- 4. Thinking creatively for future scenarios** – by using role play, real-world inquiry, futures visioning, problem-based learning, and providing space for emergence.
- 5. Collaborative learning** – including contributions from guest speakers, work-based learning, interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary working, and collaborative learning and co-inquiry.

THE ROLE OF TEACHER AND TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTION IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For a necessary transition of our societies to a more sustainable future, education and teacher have a crucial role to play. In Education for Sustainable Development the role of the teacher is different from the traditional one. Traditionally, the teacher is perceived as the one who knows the subject being taught. This is not possible in the same way with ESD since it includes “the whole world” and how it functions or too often malfunctions. The teacher may of course be very knowledgeable in some special and important aspects of the sustainable agenda, such as energy efficiency or economic policy instruments, but there are too many other subjects to cover for a single person to master.

As such the teacher should know the map rather than the detailed landscape on each part of the map. The teacher for this reason becomes a guide for the learners, to travel through the landscape of sustainable development. The teacher becomes the facilitator for the learners, a person who helps the students in the process of education for sustainable development.

Another arrangement is to teach in teams, most often two teachers together, one with more natural science background and another with more social science background. It is also recommended to invite external lectures and other interesting persons, to talk to the students.

For teachers to effectively practice ESD, they must be conscious and sensitive to relevant issues such as climate change, the environment and the contextualized meaning of sustainable development. It therefore follows that the success of education comes from well trained teachers. ESD starts at the teacher-training level, and those who train teachers must see ESD as a priority, supported by updated curriculum and teaching methods.

Effective teacher training is at the very core of the re-orientation of education for the achievement of sustainability. Dynamic interaction in the classroom and hands-on approaches should be encouraged to develop students' critical-thinking and problem-solving skills which will be required for sustainable development. There is need for greater integration and cooperation among teacher training institutions, the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions which all play a role in ESD. This integration will produce teachers who are sensitive to the issues of sustainability, and as such, will be better equipped to deliver this to students in their respective areas of specialisation.

CONCLUSION

What is needed now is a global movement, with every student in every country learning about sustainable development from well-trained teachers, equipped with the appropriate curricula and resources. An ambitious sustainable development agenda, together with a legally binding global climate deal, could go a long way toward catalyzing such a movement.

Of course, we cannot secure a sustainable future in a matter of months. But, with a well-designed set of commitments and targets, we can move onto the right path. And, with effective educational programs that instill in future generations the importance of restoring Earth's balance and delivering a prosperous future for the many, rather than the few, we can stay on that path.

That is the message that education ministers must emphasize at their upcoming forum, and that policymakers should heed as they negotiate with critical global agreements. www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/

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