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“Higher Education for Sustainable Development: A Quality Perspective”

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ABSTRACT

The growth of human capital is essential to reach its goals and vision. A nation will be weak without good human capital because it won't have people who can start new projects and look at things in fresh ways. A good education process leads to good human capital. A well-planned, professionally constructed education system is essential for cultivating such human capital. In India, the higher education sector plays a key role in developing such human capital. At the same time, the global community is increasingly focusing on sustainable development. This includes responsible use of natural resources, environmentally friendly professional practices, balanced consumption, and protecting the environment for future generations. In this context, higher education institutions have an important responsibility. Universities should not only provide knowledge and technical skills but also foster awareness regarding sustainability. This study therefore examines the role of higher education in promoting sustainability and integrating sustainable practices within the education system.

Keywords: *Higher Education, India, Human capital, Sustainable development, Education for Sustainable development (ESD)*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial resources for a nation's social and economic development is its human capital, especially its high-quality human capital. Since it propels the country toward its intended goal and mission, the development of human capital is essential. Without it, a country will be weak because there won't be enough people to take up new projects and viewpoints. As a result, the nation's most precious resource is its human capital. Developing human capital and changing citizens' perspectives are two major challenges. The development of high-quality human capital should be a top goal if the nation is to become a knowledge-based economy and a sustainable nation. A high level of human capital is not a luxury in today's globalized society. A high-quality educational process produces high-quality human capital. Education is both a human right and the main force behind change in the direction of sustainable development, enhancing

people's ability to make their social ideals a reality. People can become better citizens, family members, community members, and individuals through education. It promotes and respects the principles of a sustainable world. The social, economic, and environmental contexts are taken into account. Good education is both culturally and regionally relevant. It helps people get ready for the future and is both relevant to the present and informed by the past. Developing such human capital requires a well-thought-out education system.

Higher education institutions contribute significantly to this process of advancement by giving the country's development better educational backgrounds and professional capabilities. Therefore, higher education is an effective weapon for the country's sustained growth. Higher education is essential for developing the values, knowledge, and abilities needed to advance sustainability on a local, national, and international scale. In addition to training the future generation of leaders, universities and colleges conduct research that may offer answers to today's problems. Therefore, integrating sustainability into courses, encouraging sustainable practices on campuses and forming alliances with outside stakeholders are essential ways that higher education may impact the SDGs' accomplishment. Even while the value of higher education in sustainable development is becoming more widely acknowledged, there are still many obstacles to overcome. These include the need for more alignment between academic disciplines and the global sustainability agenda, the lack of standardized frameworks for SDG implementation within educational institutions, and the inadequate funding for sustainability research.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

An approach to the entire curriculum and administration of an institution (school, college, university, organization, etc.) is known as education for sustainable development (ESD). Differentiating between education for sustainable development (ESD) and education on sustainable development is crucial. The latter is the application of education as a tool to attain sustainability, whereas the former is an awareness lesson or theoretical discussion. Going beyond awareness is necessary in higher education, and in this instance, "for" denotes a purpose whereby all education has a purpose. A key component of sustainability is education. But it's unclear how education for sustainability differs from education as we know it. However, there is an unbreakable connection between education and sustainability. The goal of education is to improve each person's orientation and behaviour. In order to accomplish this goal, high-quality education must be provided in order to generate a large number of educated scholars who consistently push the boundaries of knowledge and, as a result, give life purpose. Particularly in a civilian and democratic society, education serves a variety of goals for its citizens. These goals are typically shaped to fit the objectives and plans of a civil and democratic environment. These include equitable growth opportunities, respect for one's own dignity and self-worth, etc. Since education is the transmission of knowledge, information, and understanding of man in his social and physical environment, among many other things, it is important to recognize that recipients of high-quality education are capable producers and agents of sustained development. As a result, quality education is more effective in helping its students socialize their behaviour. Without a doubt, by addressing sustainability through their primary functions of instruction,

research, and outreach, higher education institutions (HEI) can significantly contribute to a more sustainable society. However, HEIs must go beyond changing their operations by mainstreaming sustainability components if they are to contribute to the shift to sustainability. The idea that the changes we experience and will experience in the future are gradual, predictable, and, thus, largely controllable is severely challenged by ecological and social changes, which range from changes in ecosystems to changes in human behaviour's and interactions. The way we manage resources and regulate ecosystem services has an impact on global environmental and social systems, frequently in unexpected ways. It's time to take a close look at the capabilities that HEIs have fostered over the years, how they interact with society, and their function as institutions that create knowledge, transfer technology, and influence policy.

There are several initiatives that can be implemented to enhance the delivery of high-quality education for sustainable development, and achieving them will require enormous dedication. In this way, the organization, management, and design of high-quality educational services should be essentially practical and efficient. For all children and young people to get integrated, high-quality education, there must also be effective, on-going teacher training and retraining. Unambiguous childhood qualitative education must also be established, and it must be widely provided through careful identification, evaluation, and interaction of the fundamental requirements, priorities, and unique characteristics of community contexts. However, goals must be established with specific benchmarks. These goals will support the improvement of children's and youths' access to high-quality education for sustainable development. Once more, in order to guarantee sufficient provision as well as monitoring and feedback, policy makers and implementers must embrace specific premises when creating and constructing strategies. The delivery of high-quality education for sustainable development is based on a few very straightforward and basic ideas.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of higher education in promoting sustainable development in society.
2. To study how higher education institutions contribute to social, economic, and environmental sustainability.
3. To identify the challenges faced by higher education institutions in implementing education for sustainable development.
4. To suggest measures for improving the quality of higher education to support sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the secondary sources such as books, recently published journals, university news, master's conjecture, websites, etc., as well as descriptive techniques, interpretations, discussions, and expert opinions, among other things.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ **Concept of Higher Education:** Higher education refers to the stage of education that follows secondary schooling and is provided by universities, colleges, and other institutions of advanced learning. It includes undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs.

Higher education performs several important functions in society:

- **Knowledge Creation** – Universities generate new knowledge through research and innovation.
- **Human Capital Development** – Higher education equips individuals with specialized skills and professional knowledge required for employment.
- **Social Development** – Education promotes values such as equality, democracy, and social justice.
- **Cultural Transmission** – Universities preserve and transmit cultural knowledge and traditions.

- ❖ **Concept of Sustainable Development:** Sustainable development refers to a pattern of development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept gained global recognition through the **Brundtland Commission Report (1987)**.

Sustainable development has **three major dimensions**:

- **Economic Sustainability:** Economic sustainability focuses on long-term economic growth without causing harm to social or environmental systems. Education contributes to economic sustainability by producing skilled labor and encouraging innovation.
- **Social Sustainability:** Social sustainability emphasizes equality, social justice, and inclusive development. Education helps reduce poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Environmental sustainability focuses on protecting natural resources and ecosystems. Universities promote environmental awareness through research, education, and community programs.

Higher education institutions play an important role in integrating these three dimensions of sustainability.

- ❖ **Concept of Educational Quality:** Educational quality refers to the effectiveness of educational institutions in achieving meaningful learning outcomes. Quality education ensures that students gain knowledge, skills, values, and competencies required for personal and social development.

Educational quality in higher education can be measured through several indicators:

- **Teaching and Learning Process:** Effective teaching methods and student-centered learning approaches improve educational outcomes.

- **Faculty Qualifications:** Qualified and experienced faculty members contribute significantly to academic excellence.
- **Research and Innovation:** Universities that promote research contribute to scientific advancement and national development.
- **Infrastructure and Learning Resources:** Libraries, laboratories, and digital resources are essential for quality education.
- **Curriculum Relevance:** Curricula must be updated to address contemporary social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Educational quality is essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- By expanding knowledge, developing capacity through training, and collaborating with local communities to bolster resilience, higher education plays a significant role in promoting sustainable development paths (Berchin et al. 2021).
- The study by Fleacă et al. (2018) highlights the increasing significance of sustainable development in promoting global prosperity, attracting interest from a range of stakeholders, including corporations, academia, and civil society. It reveals a gap in higher education institutions' capacity to fully integrate sustainable development concepts while highlighting education's critical role in addressing social challenges posed by sustainable development. The report recommends that higher education institutions use customized procedures to integrate sustainability into all facets of teaching and learning in order to strengthen their position as entrepreneurial organizations in furthering sustainable development goals (SDGs).
- The growing trend of incorporating sustainability into higher education, especially in the ICT sector, is examined in Angelaki, 2024. The study looks at how sustainability affects students' environmental knowledge and attitudes and promotes its inclusion in undergraduate ICT courses. Although there is potential for improvement in university engagement with sustainability programs, the results show a considerable beneficial impact on students' intention to participate with sustainability.
- Few organizations apply sustainable development holistically, which incorporates it into the social, economic, and environmental pillars and applies it to all traditional sustainability elements. Policies, curricula, and practices pertaining to Higher Education for Sustainable Development must be changed if higher education is to align with the global sustainability agenda (Franco et al. 2019).
- In order to address a lack of clarity on this issue globally, Leal Filho et al. (2023) examined the degree of involvement of higher education institutions in executing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Results from a poll of 209 experts from 65 countries showed that there is a known need for more cooperation between and within institutions when it comes to integrating SDGs into research and teaching. The report does, however, point to the necessity of placing more of an

emphasis on updating research programs and curriculum to include the SDGs and encouraging student participation in promoting SDG-related topics.

AN OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

One of the biggest educational systems in the world is found in India. Central universities, state universities, deemed universities, private universities, institutions of national importance (created under state and federal legislation), and colleges are the six primary categories of higher education institutions, as indicated in Table 1.1. When combined, they form a vast university system. Universities are crucial to the provision of higher education. The majority of these Indian institutions have affiliated colleges that offer undergraduate and graduate studies. Higher education is provided by private universities and institutions, which are essential in meeting the growing demand.

Type of Institution	Number
Central Universities	42
State Universities	295
Private Universities	154
Deemed Universities	130
Institutes of National Importance	38
Total	659
Total Colleges	33023
Grand Total	33682

Source: www.ugc.co.in

GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Building human resources that support the nation's social, scientific, and economic development is the main goal of the higher education sector. It is important to acknowledge that the "National Policy on Education" of 1986 and the Program of Action of 1992 dictate the current approach to higher education. The two landmark reports, the "University Education Commission" of 1948–1949 (also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission) and the "Education Commission" of 1964, served as the foundation for the 1986 policy and the 1992 Action Plan. The fundamental basis for the nation's higher education strategy was actually established by these two seminal papers. The University Education Report established objectives for the advancement of the nation's higher education system. Greater access, equal access, and excellence have been the three core objectives of Indian higher education from its inception. By maximizing the output/outcome of access, making higher education fully inclusive, and encouraging international quality and excellence to accomplish the goal of the core of Indian social and economic development planning, the advancement of the Indian higher education system would ensure its expansion and strengthening.

INCREASED ACCESS: GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO (GER)

The extent of higher education in a country is generally measured by Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) (Percentage of the 18-23 age group enrolled in a higher education institution) in higher learning. The following figure 1.1 presents the growth of Indian GER, which has increasing growth rate and presently is about 18% and is targeted for 30% by 2020. The government of India proposed a dual strategy to increase the institutional capacity to achieve the target of 30% by 2020. The first component of the strategy involves additional increase in the numbers of universities, colleges, and Second component of the strategy centers on enhancing the “intake capacity” of existing educational institutions.

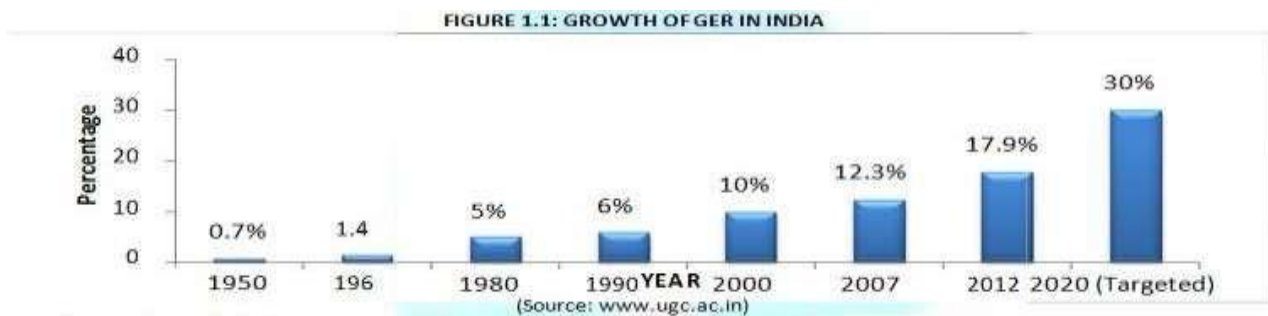
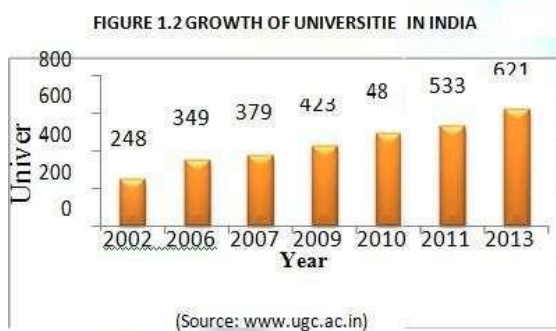
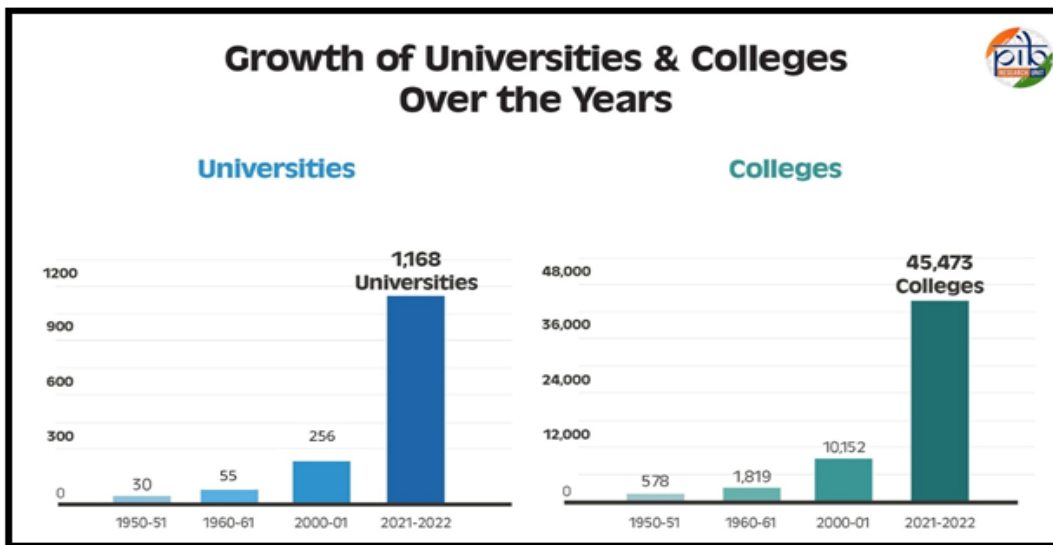


Figure 1.2 presents the growth trend of the universities in the past decade. It can be noted that there is an ample growth in the past decade. In addition, the colleges also have seen a significant growth as shown in Figure 1.3 and can be observed that India has more than 33,000 colleges with one-third of the colleges having been set up in the last five years. However, growth rate solely cannot be a measure of overall development of higher education sector. Accessibility, correcting regional, disciplinary and gender imbalances, lessening the burden of affiliation and working on new models of Public Private Partnership (PPP) are also important factors in measuring the extent of development.





Source: www.gov.co.in

EQUITY AND EQUAL ACCESS

When a talented person is not excluded from possibilities for higher education due to social or economic disadvantage, this is referred to as equity. This can be accomplished by the state, central government, and private sectors playing a greater role in promoting and facilitating higher education for the underprivileged segments of society. Eliminating gender inequality, promoting inclusion, improving access for students with disabilities, promoting equity in all general and technical/professional education disciplines, and reducing regional/disciplinary imbalances are some of the practices that can help achieve the major emphasis on promoting inclusiveness, which allows more students from the marginalized sections into the field of higher education.

EXCELLENCE AND QUALITY

Without parallel attention to quality and excellence in all higher education institutions to meet worldwide standards, only focusing on expanding higher education institutions and ensuring equitable access is insufficient to accomplish the goals of national development. With the aid of accreditation organizations, the Indian higher education industry guarantees the caliber of the educational process. There are two main accrediting organizations:

1. The University Grants Commission (UGC) founded the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 to certify universities and colleges in general education and
2. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) established the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in 1994 to accredit technical and program level education. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), the Distance Education Council (DEC), and the Agricultural Education by certification Board (AB) are a few of the other professional regulatory organizations that are working to establish their own certification bodies.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The idea of sustainable development includes social, economic, and often cultural aspects in addition to environmental ones. Nobody disputes the need of education and research for society's long-term growth, but there is on-going discussion over how to successfully include sustainability into higher education, particularly into the curriculum and research project design. The degree to which the idea of sustainable development is incorporated into higher education can vary from just formulating policy statements to incorporating it into courses, curriculum, and other specific activities for a comprehensive overhaul of the educational system. Working with tangible environmental repercussions is a more realistic way to support sustainable development. The declarations on sustainability in higher education specifically recognize this and affirm the significance of education, communication, and capacity building for sustainable development. In addition to producing graduates who are socially and politically conscious, sustainable growth in higher education will allow students to form a personal critique of society. Higher education has an obligation to develop future professionals and responsible citizens in this age of globalization and modernization. Higher education must develop the human capital that will enable everyone, both now and in the future, to enjoy a respectable quality of life, equitable access to the planet's resources, and the preservation of the biologically diverse ecosystems that are essential to our survival. It is our societal duty to contribute to the development of a sustainable society, both for our graduates in their personal and professional life as well as for the educators of future leaders in society. In order to improve the Indian education system, the eleventh five-year plan also aims to increase public spending, support private initiatives, and start long-term, significant structural and policy reforms. Unquestionably, the results will depend on both the policies and how they are implemented.

In order to help important participants increase the efficacy of their potential or existing sustainability initiatives, the following reasons could hinder the implementation of sustainability initiatives in higher education institutions: Absence of knowledge, enthusiasm, and participation, Organizational structure, a lack of funding, a lack of support from university administrators, a lack of time, a lack of data access, a lack of training, a lack of appropriate communication and information, a profit-driven mindset, resistance to change, a lack of stricter regulations, a lack of interdisciplinary research, a lack of performance indicators, lack of rules to promote sustainability on campus, lack of standard definitions of ideas, technical issues, lack of dedicated workplace.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, a responsible and legitimate government must consistently provide high-quality education for sustainable development. Because the challenges of development are fundamentally intended to bring about political stability, rapid economic transformation, equitable resource distribution through poverty reduction, food security, unemployment reduction, administration of justice and the rule of law, etc., high-quality education is necessary for sustainable development. Without a doubt, providing all individuals with

high-quality education will strengthen the social structures that impede or prohibit the provision of all other services, such as health care, food and nutrition, shelter, gainful job, etc.

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