



THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS).

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ABSTRACT:

Education plays a transformative role in achieving sustainable development by shaping human capabilities, promoting social equity, and fostering economic growth. India, as a signatory to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations, recognizes education as both a standalone goal (SDG-4) and a catalyst for achieving other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper examines the significant issues and challenges facing the Indian education system and possible solutions. And the role of the Indian education system in advancing sustainable development, with special reference to policy reforms such as the Ministry of Education's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Using secondary data from official reports including the NITI Aayog SDG Index and the University Grants Commission AISHE Report, this study analyses progress, strengths, and structural limitations. The findings indicate significant improvements in enrolment and policy integration of sustainability concepts; however, disparities in quality, access, and skill-based education remain persistent challenges. The paper concludes with policy suggestions to strengthen the alignment between education and sustainable development outcomes.

Keywords: *Indian Education System, Sustainable Development, Quality, Access, etc.*

1.INTRODUCTION:

India is the largest education systems of the World, with a diverse range of educational institutions catering to millions of students across the country. However, despite significant progress in recent years, the Indian education system faces several challenges that must be addressed to ensure that every student has access to high-quality education. One of the most significant challenges the Indian education system faces is the quality of education. Despite significant improvements in recent years, many schools, colleges, and universities still lack adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, and an updated curriculum. Many schools in rural areas lack basic facilities such as electricity, water supply, and toilets, which can harm the quality of education. Additionally, there is a significant shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas. The affordability and accessibility of education are significant challenges facing the Indian education system. Education in India is still not affordable for a significant proportion of the population. Additionally, there is a significant disparity in access to education between urban and rural areas, with many students in rural areas struggling to access quality education. The Indian education system still follows a traditional approach to education and lacks the flexibility to adapt to changing needs of society and the job market. The curriculum is often outdated and does not fully prepare students for the modern World. Additionally, there is a significant focus on theoretical knowledge, which can result in a lack of practical skills among students. There is a significant shortage of qualified teachers in the country, particularly in rural areas. This shortage can significantly impact the quality of education provided to students and lead to a lack of continuity in teaching. As the global economy becomes increasingly interconnected, Indian education must also address the growing disconnect between traditional

curricula and international employment demands. The US job market, one of the primary destinations for Indian professionals, is undergoing significant shifts driven by technological advancement, demographic changes, and evolving industry needs. Understanding these trends is crucial for educational reform in India. For instance, the most in-demand jobs in the USA reveal a strong emphasis on healthcare professionals, technology specialists, and skilled trades sectors where practical skills, critical thinking, and adaptability are paramount. Indian educational institutions must evolve beyond rote memorization and theoretical frameworks to incorporate hands-on training, soft skills development, and exposure to real-world problem-solving. This alignment with global job market requirements will not only enhance employability for Indian graduates seeking intern. The Indian education system relies heavily on examinations to evaluate students, which can be stressful and often results in a focus on rote learning rather than understanding concepts. Additionally, the examination system can be a source of significant stress for students, leading to a lack of interest in learning.

2.CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development is that which aims for equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development, integrating social, economic, and environmental sustainability with a focus on equity. The Brundtland Commission's iconic statement "Sustainable development is development that fulfils the present needs without jeopardising or compromising future generations' ability to fulfil their own needs" defines it aptly. The United Nations General Assembly also stated this in 1987. Some Scholars have stated that Sustainable Development is open-ended, much critiqued as ambiguous, incoherent, and therefore easily appropriated (Yunita, Abbie; Biermann, Frank; Kim, Rakhyun E.; Vijge, Marjanneke J.,2022).

World Health Organisation Views Sustainable Development as a broad term to describe policies, projects and investments that provide benefits today without sacrificing environmental, social and personal health in the future. The term Sustainable Development refers to achieving economic and social development in ways that do not exhaust a country natural resource. Ashford and The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) argued that Sustainable Development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs. In brief the concept of sustainable development is multi-disciplinary in nature coalescing economic, social, environmental, cultural, and political dimensions of development. However sustainable development cannot be attained without the participation of its stakeholders. It is from the peoples' perspective that I intend to talk on sustainable development and the strategies to attain it empowering people by 2047- the 100 years of India's Independence.

'Viksit Bharat' the much-articulated vision for India @2047 aims to transform India into a developed, globally influential nation by 2047 by encompassing four main aspects of development: economic growth, social progress, environment sustainability and good governance. It aims to take Indian economy to \$30 trillion within just two decades. A focus on sustainable growth is critical, involving the adoption of eco-friendly technologies and circular economy models to ensure environmental resilience in the long term. Strengthening human capital is equally important, which means enhancing education, healthcare, and skill- building initiatives to prepare the youth for emerging job markets. Additionally, India must invest in expanding infrastructure and embracing digital transformation, including AI-driven automation and smart city development, to improve economic efficiency and growth (NITI Ayog April 2025). The focus of the present paper is on the role of the Indian education system in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

3.SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION:

Sustainable Development refers to development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The 17 SDGs adopted in 2015 emphasize interconnected progress across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Among them, SDG-4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. In India, education is not only a constitutional right under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, but also a strategic instrument for poverty reduction, gender equality, climate action, and economic transformation. India's education reforms, especially under NEP 2020, aim to Increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035.Integrate vocational education at all levels. Promote multidisciplinary and research-based learning and Strengthen digital and technological inclusion. India's SDG Index score improved from 57 (2018)

to 71 (2023-24), indicating measurable progress. However, regional disparities and learning outcome gaps persist.

4.OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are following

1. To examine the Education and sustainable development goal progress indicators
2. To attempt to understand the Positive Contributions in education.
3. To study the Structural Challenges in Indian education system

5. METHODOLOGY

The study deals with The Present Indian Education System in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This study is based on secondary data such as online and offline journals, books, periodicals includes SDG India Index Reports (NITI Aayog), AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education), NEP 2020 policy documents, UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Reports, World Bank education statistics and Government education statistics and parliamentary reports.

6. ANALYSIS

Education in India has transitioned from access-focused reforms to quality and sustainability-oriented transformation. However, structural inequalities, teacher shortages, infrastructure gaps, and uneven implementation weaken the SDG alignment. Education must not only produce employable graduates but also environmentally conscious and socially responsible citizens. Sustainability education should be mainstreamed across disciplines rather than treated as an optional subject.

6.1 EDUCATION AND SDG4: PROGRESS INDICATORS

India's overall SDG index score reached 67 out of 100 in 2025, placing it 99th among 167 countries, reflecting progress in human development areas, including education. According to the National Indicator Framework, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in tertiary education increased from 23.7% (2015–16) to 29.5% (2022–23), indicating higher participation in higher education. At the same time Female Gross Enrolment Ratio has shown steady improvement. Expansion of digital education platforms such as SWAYAM, MOOCs and DIKSHA. However, Increase in institutional participation in global sustainability rankings.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: TREND PERFORMANCE (2015–2025)

Table 1: India's SDG Index Score – Overall Progress

Year	SDG Index Score	Rank (Global)	Remarks
2018	57	—	Baseline year
2019	60	—	Moderate progress
2020	66	—	Improvement in social indicators
2021	66	120	Pandemic impact visible
2022	67	121	Recovery phase
2023–24	71	99	Strong improvement
2025*	~72–73 (Est.)	~95–100	Sustained momentum

Source: NITI Aayog SDG India Index Reports

The Table -1 shows that SDG score has been improved by nearly **15 points (2018–2024)**. The Improvement driven by gains in health, education, and gender parity. However, Pandemic slowed momentum but post-2022 recovery is evident.

6.2 POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS IN EDUCATION

Expanding Access and Inclusion the RTE Act and scholarship schemes have improved school enrolment and reduced gender gaps. NEP 2020 emphasizes vocational training from middle school onwards, aligning education with SDG-8. Indian universities are increasingly contributing to sustainability research and climate action. Post-pandemic expansion of digital learning platforms enhanced accessibility, particularly in remote regions.

6.3 STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES IN INDIAN EDUCATION

While India's education system has made measurable strides by expanding access, improving enrolment rates, and narrowing gender gaps, significant qualitative challenges remain in achieving learning outcomes that align with SDG 4 goals. Persistent issues in literacy proficiency, low vocational participation, and insufficient investment highlight structural barriers that need urgent policy attention. Learning Outcome Gaps are there. Despite high enrolment, foundational literacy and numeracy levels remain uneven across states. States differ significantly in educational infrastructure and SDG performance leads to Regional Disparities. Though policies promote vocational education, only about half of secondary schools offer structured skill programs. Due Funding Constraints Public expenditure on education remains around 3% of GDP, below the recommended 6% target. Digital Divided rural and urban Rural and marginalized communities face connectivity and device limitations.

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (2015–2025)

Academic Year	GER (%)	Female GER (%)	Male GER (%)
2015–16	23.7	22.9	24.5
2017–18	25.2	24.5	26.3
2019–20	27.1	27.3	26.9
2020–21	27.3	27.9	26.7
2021–22	28.4	28.5	28.3
2022–23	29.5	29.8	29.1
2024–25*	~30.5 (Est.)	~31.2	~29.8

Source: University Grants Commission AISHE Reports

The Table -2 shows that GER increased by nearly 6–7 percentage points in a decade. Female GER now surpasses male GER. Progress aligns with NEP 2020 target of 50% by 2035. However, growth rate must accelerate to meet the 2035 target.

Table 3: Public Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)

Year	Education Expenditure (% of GDP)
2015–16	3.8%
2017–18	4.0%
2019–20	4.3%
2020–21	4.1%
2021–22	4.2%
2023–24	~4.1%
2024–25 (BE)	~4.2%

Source: Government Budget Documents & Economic Survey

Table- 3 shows the Spending remains below the 6% target however recommended in National Education Policy 2020. Resource constraints limit infrastructure and teacher recruitment. Fiscal prioritization remains a structural challenge.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Indian education system plays a foundational role in achieving sustainable development goals. Significant policy reforms and measurable statistical improvements demonstrate progress. However, sustainability outcomes depend on Quality improvement, Equity in access, Effective vocational integration, strengthened research ecosystem and Increased public investment. Without addressing structural inequalities, education may expand quantitatively but fail to transform development qualitatively.

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To accelerate progress toward the SDGs by 2030, the Indian education system must Enhance learning outcomes by improving foundational literacy and numeracy through targeted interventions and standardized learning assessments. Increase public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP, Universalize foundational literacy and numeracy under mission mode. Integrate sustainability education across curricula. Expand vocational education to all secondary schools. Strengthen teacher training in SDG-oriented pedagogy. Reduce regional disparities through targeted funding. Enhance digital infrastructure in rural and tribal regions and Encourage university-industry partnerships for green innovation.

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