



Higher Education and Sustainable Development Goals: Policy Perspectives from Andhra Pradesh under NEP 2020

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Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a result of the adoption by the United Nations in 2015, and it can be described as global set of inclusiveness and sustainable development pathways to address socio-economic and environmental challenges. Colleges and universities should be central to realising these objectives by not only encouraging innovation, creating knowledge and developing human resources that can tackle the intricate development problems. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India offers a radical model of reorganizing the higher education system based on multidisciplinary learning, research excellence, and social responsibility, and thus in line with the SDG priorities. With a Gross Enrolment Ratio of approximately 37 percent and a developing network of universities and colleges, Andhra Pradesh is a region to consider in order to study how SDGs can be incorporated into the academic policy frameworks (AISHE, 2024). The paper will discuss how a policy under NEP 2020 can enable higher education institutions to promote Sustainable Development Goals. It relies on primary and secondary data to examine institutional initiatives, contribution of research, and policy reforms and it throws light on obstacles in implementing these reforms, including difficulty in funding, disparities between infrastructure, and lack of even distribution of reforms. The paper finds that to maximize the role played by higher education in sustainable and inclusive development, institutional capacity, increased funding available to research, and interdisciplinary collaboration are required.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Higher Education; National Education Policy (NEP) 2020; Sustainable Development; Andhra Pradesh

Introduction

In recent societies, higher education has been found to be a key motivator of economic growth, social change, as well as innovativeness. Universities and colleges are the centers of knowledge which generate talented human resources, support research and innovation to solve burning issues facing the world like poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation and health crisis of the people. The Sustainable Development Goals offer an inclusive and global roadmap to sustainable development that will be achieved by the year 2030 and the institutions of higher learning are at the core of the implementation of the same through teaching, research, and community involvement (United Nations, 2015).

One of the greatest systems in the world in respect of higher education is Indian in the sense that there are more than 43 million students in universities and colleges (AISHE, 2024). The National Education Policy 2020 is a great reform to transform the higher education environment based on multidisciplinary learning, curriculum leeway, research encouragement, and institutional autonomy. The policy is more focused on innovation, sustainability, and the development of skills and makes universities more present to the national and global priorities of development.

Andhra Pradesh has been keen to pursue NEP reforms by restructuring the curriculum, digital learning programs, and research, promotion. A number of institutions in the state are starting to invest more in the sustainability-based research and community outreach activities. Nevertheless, issues like financing constraints, institutional inequalities in infrastructure, inability to work interdisciplinarily, and discrepancies between research findings and policy execution have remained impediments to the developments. This research paper looks at the contribution made by institutions of higher learning in Andhra Pradesh in the development of SDGs and some of the policy challenges and opportunities.

Review of Literature

Higher Education and The Sustainable Development.

Universities are also important to sustainable development because they generate human resources that are highly skilled and provide policy-relevant research (UNESCO, 2023). Colleges and universities are important in facilitating social change and innovation.

Academic SY Integration of SDGs.

Research has shown that the inclusion of sustainability in curricula will boost awareness and responsible citizenship (UNDP, 2022). The institutions which go with sustainability-driven programs are more associated with priorities on development.

NEP 2020 as a Transformative Policy Framework.

NEP 2020 facilitates research quality, multidisciplinary education, and university independence, which make universities respond to SDG priorities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Difficulties in the Sustainability Initiatives.

The drawbacks encountered by universities in developing countries include the lack of funding, poor infrastructure, and industry engagement (World Bank, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore whether higher education institutions in Andhra Pradesh have contributed to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals as a part of NEP 2020.
2. To provide policy initiatives, institutional practices, and research contributions that help to facilitate sustainability-oriented research and education.
3. To determine the major challenges and opportunities of enhancing the contribution of higher education to sustainable development.

Research Methodology

The given research design is a descriptive and analytical research when the authors consider the contribution of higher education to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals based on the National Education Policy 2020 in Andhra Pradesh. To have in-depth analysis and enhancing reliability of findings, a mixed-method design in which both primary and secondary data were used was adopted.

The primary data were obtained in a structured questionnaire that was given to faculty members, research scholars, and academic administrators of some universities and colleges in Andhra Pradesh. The respondents were selected at random through a sampling technique of the people who are directly connected to teaching, research, or institutional administration. One hundred and twenty respondents took part in the study and the discipline covered by them was in the social sciences integrated with the streams of commerce, management, environmental studies and science.

The questionnaire included closed-ended questions and low Likert items that aimed at understanding the perceptions of the respondents regarding the knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals, the incorporation of sustainability in teaching and curriculum, their contribution in research areas, institutional programs, and difficulties encountered on the adoption of a sustainability-focus practice. Some informal interviews had also been held with the sampled respondents to get their qualitative information on the practices in institutions and policy awareness.

The primary data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods, like percentages, averages, and frequency distribution to define the patterns and trends in the level of awareness, institutional initiatives, and perceived challenges.

Various authoritative sources such as the National Education Policy 2020, AISHE reports, Government of Andhra Pradesh publications, UNESCO reports, United Nations SDG reports, and other academic literature on the same were also used to gather secondary data. The secondary data helped to give a wider policy and institutional background of interpreting the primary data.

The merge of primary and secondary data would allow having a comprehensive picture of how institutions of higher learning facilitate sustainable development and finding gaps in policy realisation along with institutional policies.

Results

Primary data analysis offers significant information on the consciousness, institutionalization, research input, and issues when it comes to implementing Sustainable Development Goals in institutions of higher learning in Andhra Pradesh.

The results show that about 72 percent of interviewees are aware of such a phenomenon as Sustainable Development Goals, so there is an increasing awareness of the sustainability in academic institutions. Nevertheless, only a relatively small part, 45 percent of the respondents reported specific SDG targets and indicators, which points to the difference between the general awareness and the practical one.

The findings include the realization that approximately 60 percent of respondents consider that the concepts of sustainability are applied in curriculum and teaching practices mostly in courses like environmental studies, social science, and commerce. Nevertheless, the integration has not been uniform through the departments and institutions because the capacity of the institutions and the available resources vary.

Almost 55 percent of respondents have been in research projects dealing with such sustainability themes like environmental conservation, climate change, rural development, gender equality and social inclusion. This means that educational institutions of higher learning are slowly adjusting research objectives to the provisions of sustainable development.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents had institutional programs like community outreach, environmental awareness and skill development exercises, which indicated the rising institutional participation to sustainability practice.

Although such positive advances were made, there were serious challenges, which were found. Approximately 68 percent of the respondents mentioned that constraint of research funds is a primary

limitation whereas 52 percent pointed at poor infrastructure as a major constraint. Among them, 48 percent said that they had no interdisciplinary teamwork, and 43 percent said that their weakness was little training.

With regards to policy impact, about half of the respondents reported that NEP 2020 has already made a positive impact on institutional practices with instigating multidisciplinary education and research work. But there is a medium level of awareness in relation to certain sustainability provisions in the policy.

On the whole, the findings reflect that the higher education institutions in Andhra Pradesh are gradually coming up in incorporating Sustainable Development Goals, yet the institutional and resource weaknesses remain significant constraints to the sustainability efforts.

Discussion

The study reveals the changing nature of institution of higher learning in Andhra Pradesh identifying them as agents of advancing Sustainable Development Goals by education, research, committed work and association with communities. The specified degree of general awareness of respondents shows that sustainability is a significant aspect of academic discourse that has already gained significance. Nonetheless, the moderate familiarity with particular SDG targets imply that the knowledge should be enhanced by the means of systematic training programs and institutional orientation courses.

The inculcation of the concept of sustainability in the curriculum is based on the impact of NEP 2020 which focuses on multidisciplinary education, innovation and socially significance education. But there is a great difference in institutional implementation that implies inequality in terms of institutional capacity, finance and administrative support. Those institutions that are well integrated in terms of infrastructure and leadership are the ones with well developed sustainability practices.

The existence of research activities on local development issues such as rural livelihoods, environmental conservation, and social inclusion shows that universities can help in the development of the region. The extent and the effect of research efforts are however limited by the issue of funding and inadequate infrastructure, which limits their contribution to the outcome of long term sustainability.

Community outreach programs and awareness campaigns are examples of institutional efforts that bring out the social responsibility aspect of universities. These efforts improve university-community relations and also bring about development in the community. Nonetheless, the lack of formal sustainability policies in certain institutions implies that there is a necessity to use systematic structures of organization to organize initiatives.

The collaboration between academia, government, industry, and community organizations is also processed in the discussed context. These types of partnerships are capable of increasing the practicality of research and provide innovation-based solutions to sustainability issues. Such collaboration opportunities have been provided by NEP 2020, which only can be effective through constant control and institutional intent.

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All in all, the discussion points out that despite the improvement, more funding, better infrastructure, and better institutional policies, as well as greater collaboration of the stakeholders are needed to attain meaningful integration of Sustainable Development Goals in high education.

Recommendations

According to the research findings, a number of recommendations can be made on enhancing the contribution of the role of higher education institutions to Sustainable Development Goals in Andhra Pradesh.

To begin with, universities are supposed to institute special cells on sustainability or SDG to facilitate sustainability related work, raise awareness and track the progress. These institutional mechanisms would be able to internalize the systematic inclusion of SDGs into academic/research activities.

Second, the government agencies and institutional authorities should aim at funding sustainability oriented research projects more actively. Innovation can be boosted through research grants and financial incentives that would increase research results.

Third, periodic training sessions, workshops and faculty development must be undertaken to enhance the knowledge and awareness of SDG frameworks among academic stakeholders.

Fourth, institutions of higher learning ought to change their curriculums to encompass the concepts of sustainability, case studies and hands-on learning experiences that would give the students the ability to handle real life issues.

Fifth, universities must foster disciplinary research through encouraging inter-departmental cooperation and creating research clusters around such sustainability themes like climate change, renewable energy, and social inclusion.

Sixth, those industry-academia ties need to be strengthened to facilitate applied research, innovation, and training of skills. The feasibility of the academic research can be increased through collaborative works with industry organizations and the community.

Seventh, the monitoring and evaluation models should be established to determine the effectiveness of sustainability efforts and research contributions to SDGs by institutions so that the continuous enhancement can be ensured.

Lastly, the community involvement and outreach activities can be encouraged where better education institutions would contribute to lifestyle factors of the region by supporting community development and support programs.

Conclusion

Universities, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning are transformational towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals by embracing innovation, conducting research, and being socially responsible. According to the research one of the indicators is the progressive inclusion of the concepts of sustainability within the teaching and research practices in institutions of Andhra Pradesh under the banner of NEP 2020. The spread of campus education and institutional efforts reflect good progress in regards to integrating sustainability.

Nevertheless, the constraints of funding, infrastructural inequalities, lack of interdisciplinary cooperation and unbalanced enforcement of policies remain as problematic to the complete achievement of sustainability programs. These problems need enhanced institutional determination, increased funding processes, and better coordination of the policies to address these challenges.

NEP 2020 offers a solid basis regarding the alignment of the higher education with the priorities of sustainable development, yet its successful implementation requires monitoring and capacity building to continue on a regular basis. With proper curriculum, research agenda, and community engagement programs, institutions of higher learning in Andhra Pradesh have a high chance of attaining Sustainable Development Goals and promoting inclusive development.

Finally, there is a strong need to integrate efforts by policymakers, institutions of higher learning, partners in the industry, and local stakeholders to make higher education a strong mechanism of sustainable development and future social improvement.

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