



Higher Education as a Driver for Sustainable Development: Viksit Bharat @ 2047

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Abstract

Higher education is a critical enabler of sustainable development, contributing to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. In the context of Viksit Bharat @ 2047, India's aspiration to become a developed nation, higher education institutions (HEIs) serve as engines of knowledge creation, innovation, and human capital development. This paper analyzes the role of higher education in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and climate action (SDG 13). Drawing on policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and empirical indicators like Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) and employability rates, the study highlights both opportunities and systemic constraints. The paper adopts an analytical approach to examine the intersection of higher education and sustainability, identifying structural gaps such as inequitable access, funding limitations, and weak industry-academia linkages. It proposes a multi-pronged strategy involving digital transformation, research ecosystems, global collaborations, and outcome-based education. The findings suggest that strengthening higher education is indispensable for building a resilient, innovation-driven, and inclusive economy aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

Key words: Higher Education, Sustainable Development, Viksit Bharat 2047, NEP 2020, SDGs, Innovation, Employability, Digital Learning

1. Introduction

Higher education has increasingly been recognized as a strategic asset in national development. It not only produces skilled human capital but also drives innovation, research, and institutional capacity building (Tilak, 2021). India, with one of the largest youth populations globally, is uniquely positioned to leverage higher education as a transformative force. The vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047 emphasizes inclusive growth, technological advancement, and sustainability. In this context, higher education institutions (HEIs) are expected to function as knowledge hubs that integrate teaching, research, and societal engagement.

Sustainable development, as articulated by the Brundtland Commission, encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The alignment of higher education with these dimensions is essential for long-term national progress. This paper explores how higher education can act as a catalyst in achieving sustainable development in India.

2. Literature Review:

Tilak (2021) emphasizes education as a development driver. UNESCO (2021) highlights sustainability integration. World Bank (2022) links higher education with economic growth. However, gaps remain in employability and access.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data from AISHE, UNESCO, and policy reports. It uses comparative and trend analysis methods.

4. Conceptual Framework

The relationship between higher education and sustainable development can be conceptualized through three interconnected pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. HEIs contribute to economic growth by enhancing productivity and fostering innovation (World Bank, 2022). Socially, they promote equity and mobility through access to quality education. Environmentally, they support sustainability through research, awareness, and green practices (UNESCO, 2021).

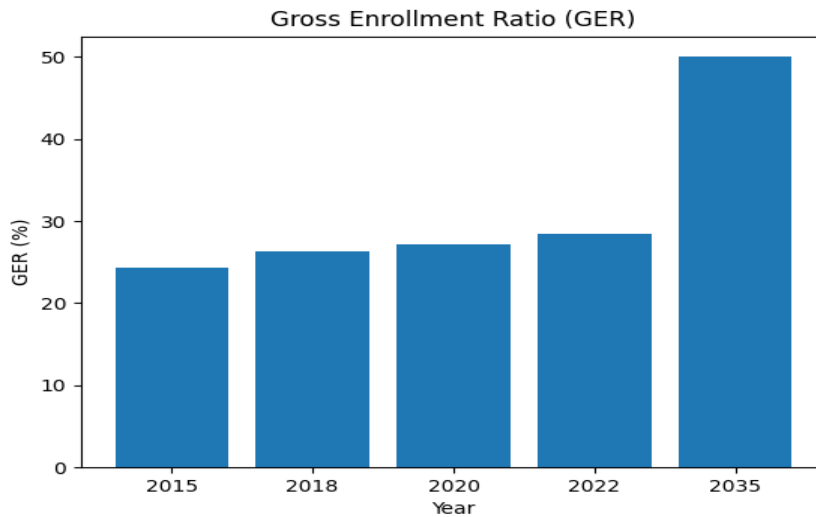
This tripartite framework underscores the systemic role of higher education in shaping a sustainable future, particularly in emerging economies like India.

5. Economic Contributions of Higher Education

Higher education contributes to economic development by producing a skilled workforce capable of driving industrial and technological advancement. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2023), India's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has increased to over 28%, reflecting expanding access. However, achieving the NEP 2020 target of 50% GER by 2035 requires sustained policy efforts.

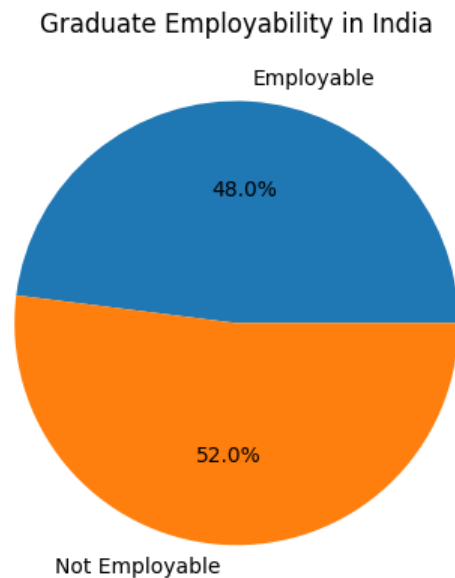
Innovation ecosystems within universities, particularly in institutions such as IITs and IISc, have led to the growth of startups and research-driven enterprises. India is currently the third-largest startup ecosystem globally, demonstrating the economic impact of higher education.

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER)



Employability

Employability remains around 45–50%, indicating skill gaps.



6. Social Impact and Inclusivity

Higher education plays a critical role in promoting social equity and reducing inequality. Government initiatives such as scholarships, reservations, and digital learning platforms aim to enhance access for marginalized communities. Education fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, and democratic participation, contributing to a more inclusive society.

Despite these efforts, disparities persist across regions and socio-economic groups, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

7. Environmental Sustainability

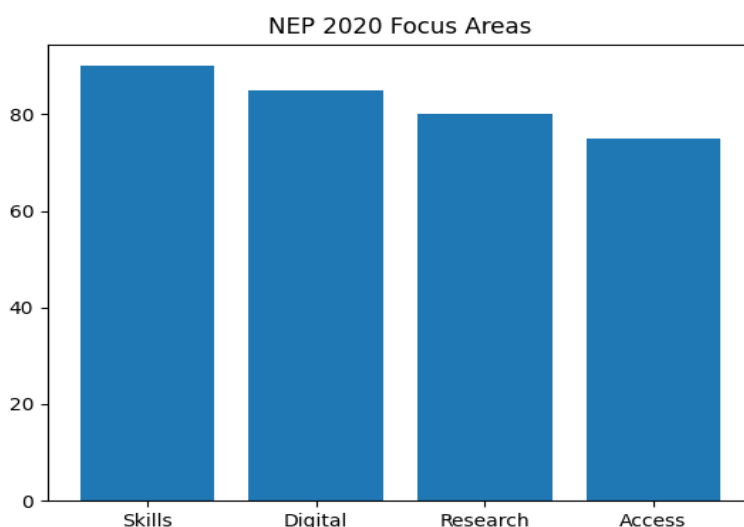
HEIs are increasingly integrating sustainability into their curricula and campus operations. Green campuses, renewable energy adoption, and sustainability-focused research are becoming more prevalent. These initiatives align with global sustainability goals and contribute to climate action (SDG 13).

Students exposed to sustainability education are more likely to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors, amplifying the long-term impact of higher education.

8. Policy Perspective: NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative shift in India's education system. It emphasizes multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, digital integration, and research orientation. The policy aims to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements, thereby enhancing employability.

NEP 2020 also promotes internationalization and collaboration, positioning India as a global education hub.



7.

9. Data Analysis and Discussion

GER trends show steady growth, but disparities persist. Employability gaps highlight skill mismatches.

The findings suggest that while access has improved, quality and employability remain concerns

10. Challenges in Higher Education

Despite significant progress, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of higher education in India. These include unequal access, quality disparities, skill mismatches, and inadequate funding. According to various reports, employability among graduates remains around 45–50%, indicating a gap between education and industry needs.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for realizing the full potential of higher education in driving sustainable development.

11. Strategic Recommendations

A comprehensive strategy is required to strengthen higher education. Key measures include increasing public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP, promoting digital learning platforms, and fostering industry-academia collaboration. Additionally, interdisciplinary research and global partnerships can enhance innovation and knowledge exchange.

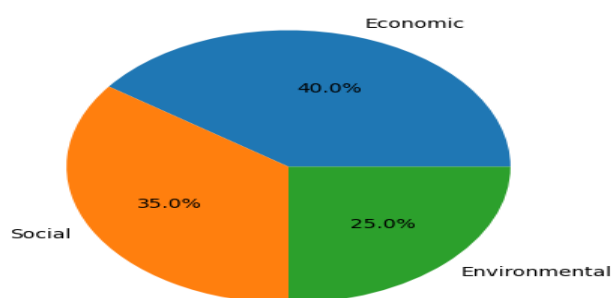
Outcome-based education and continuous curriculum reform are essential for aligning education with evolving global demands.

12. Future Vision: Viksit Bharat @ 2047

By 2047, India aims to establish itself as a global leader in education, innovation, and sustainability. Higher education will play a central role in achieving this vision by producing globally competitive graduates and advancing research. A focus on inclusivity, quality, and sustainability will define the future trajectory of India's education system.

13. Statistical Analysis

HE Contribution to Sustainable Development



14. Conclusion

Higher education is a cornerstone of sustainable development and national progress. By addressing existing challenges and implementing strategic reforms, India can build a robust and inclusive education system. Such a system will be instrumental in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047 and contributing to global sustainability goals.

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