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Obstacles That Prevent Economics Education From Being Integrated for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at the obstacles that stand in the way of Economics Education's smooth integration with sustainable development. Based on a thorough analysis of case studies and literature, the study pinpoints the primary roadblocks preventing advancement in this field. The academic standards with disciplines, the issue of interdisciplinarity, change resistance, and economics and teacher education are some of the challenges that have been identified. The report suggests various strategic options to overcome these obstacles. These include, among other things, redesigning the economics curriculum, implementing active learning techniques, and taking a multidisciplinary approach that combines ideas from several academic fields, such as political science, sociology, environmental science, and ethics, to provide students with a thorough understanding of sustainability issues.

KEYWORDS

Economics Education, Obstacles, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

Many academics, including Brundtland (2019) and Foley (2020), believe that sustainable development is an essential strategy for preventing economic crises and guaranteeing the long-term prosperity of society. The latter was made possible in large part by the 2015 adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2019). UN Secretary-General António Guterres claims that despite best efforts, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be accomplished and that the globe and the future we want are in jeopardy. Accelerated development and group effort are now needed to achieve the SDGs (Guterres, 2019). Significantly, attaining sustainability depends on the function of Economics Education, which is consistent with SDG 4: Quality Education (Foley, 2016). Sustainable development satisfies current needs without jeopardising the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own. Although the term "sustainable development" has many different meanings, it refers to a development strategy that seeks to strike a balance between various, frequently conflicting needs and the knowledge of the social, economic, and environmental constraints that our society faces (Sustainable Development

Commission, 2023). Sustainable development is regarded as crucial for preventing economic crises for several reasons:

- a. **Resource Conservation:** Sustainable development promotes prudent resource management and preservation. The depletion of resources and possible supply chain disruptions that could lead to economic downturns can be avoided by making optimal use of resources and encouraging the use of renewable alternatives.
- b. **Stability and Resilience:** By encouraging economic activity that is resistant to shocks and fluctuations, sustainable development helps make economies less susceptible to financial crises. Economies can become more resilient to external shocks by adopting sustainable practices and diversifying their businesses.
- c. **Innovation and Adaptation:** The pursuit of sustainable development frequently spurs technology advancements and the uptake of cleaner, more effective technologies. These developments have the potential to boost economic expansion and give businesses a competitive edge in a world that is changing quickly.
- d. **Social Inclusion:** Social inclusion and the reduction of inequality are key components of sustainable development, and they can result in societies that are more resilient and stable. A more stable economic climate can be achieved by inclusive economic growth, which can increase consumer purchasing power and lessen social unrest.
- e. **Climate Change Mitigation:** By concentrating on cutting greenhouse gas emissions and moving toward low-carbon economies, sustainable development tackles climate change issues. To avoid catastrophic economic effects brought on by extreme weather, a shortage of resources, and rising sea levels, climate change must be addressed.
- f. **Long-term Planning:** Governments and corporations can prioritise long-term planning over short-term advantages by integrating sustainability concepts into economic strategies. By doing this, the exploitation of resources for short-term gain at the expense of future generations is lessened.
- g. **International Cooperation:** Sustainable development is an international endeavour that calls for coordination and cooperation between nations. Countries can avert economic crises that could result from global problems like pandemics, climate change, and financial instability by cooperating to handle shared concerns.

It's crucial to remember that while sustainable development offers a framework for responsible and balanced growth, it is not a cure-all for all economic problems. Governments, corporations, civil society organisations, and individuals must all actively participate in putting policies and practices that put the welfare of present and future generations first into action. Through the adoption of sustainable development principles, society can progress toward a future that is both robust and wealthy.

The main sustainable hurdle that this study addresses first is the prevailing societal worldview. Aside from the economics curriculum itself, several obstacles impacted by the prevailing social paradigm stand in the way of integrating Economics Education for sustainable development. These include opposition to change in the educational system, pedagogical norms of disciplinarity, and the difficulty of interdisciplinarity.

Predominant Social Theory

First used by Pirages and Ehrlich in 1974, the phrase "dominant social paradigm" describes the prevalent values, beliefs, conventions, and presumptions that mould a society's common worldview and impact its institutions, behaviours, and policies. It serves as the broad lens through which people view and understand political, social, economic, and environmental issues. Different societies will have different prevailing social paradigms, which may change as a result of cultural changes, technological improvements, or modifications to the social, economic, or environmental landscape. It has a big impact on how people think, what policies should be prioritised, and what each person and group does. For instance, economic expansion, consumerism, and the pursuit of material wealth were once seen as the main markers of progress and success in many industrialised nations. This paradigm frequently gave short-term financial gain precedence over long-term sustainability and ecological considerations. But in recent

years, there has been a rising awareness of this paradigm's shortcomings, particularly about how it affects the environment, social justice, and general well-being. As a result, to strike a balance between economic growth and social and environmental concerns, alternative paradigms like sustainable development, social inclusion, and well-being economics have gained popularity. Education systems, corporate practices, public legislation, and cultural values can all be influenced by the prevailing social paradigm. It is not static, though, and the prevailing social paradigm is subject to modifications and shifts to make room for fresh viewpoints and priorities when new problems arise and cultural norms change. For example, concerns about social justice and sustainability have gained traction in public debate due to challenges like inequality, climate change, and global interconnection. These issues have also challenged established paradigms and encouraged more inclusive and sustainable approaches to development. Since the dominant social paradigm affects how decisions are made and how society develops, both individuals and policymakers must understand it. Stakeholders can critically analyse and actively endeavour to create a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable society by acknowledging the existing attitudes and assumptions.

Neoliberalism in the West is central to the Dominant Social Paradigm. According to Harvey and Foley (2020), neoliberal economy, or neoliberalism, is an economic philosophy that supports market liberalisation and a smaller role for the government in economic matters. It became well-known as an economic theory in the second half of the 20th century and has influenced many international economic practices and policies. The following are essential traits of a neoliberal economy:

Principles of the Free Market: Neoliberalism advances the notion that markets are the most effective system for distributing resources and setting prices. It highlights the need for less government interference in the economy and the unhindered operation of market forces.

- a. **Deregulatory:** Neoliberal policies frequently support the removal of restrictions and trade and investment obstacles. The objectives of this strategy are to draw in foreign investment, boost economic efficiency, and improve competitiveness.
- b. **Privatisation:** The transfer of state-owned businesses and services to the private sector is supported by neoliberalism. Privatisation is thought to have the potential to boost productivity, stimulate innovation, and enhance the calibre of services.
- c. **Fiscal Restraint:** Neoliberal economic policies usually place a high priority on fiscal restraint and support lowering public debt and budget deficits. This strategy aims to lower the danger of inflation and maintain macroeconomic stability.
- d. **Liberalisation of Capital Flows:** Neoliberalism promotes international investment and globalisation by allowing capital to travel freely across national boundaries.
- e. **Decreased Welfare Spending:** Neoliberalism frequently promotes a cap on social welfare spending, claiming that this will discourage people from working and impede economic expansion.
- f. **Emphasis on Individual Responsibility:** The ideology places a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship and individual responsibility since it views these as the main forces behind success and economic growth.
- g. **Advocacy for Trade Liberalisation:** To promote economic efficiency and integration, neoliberalism backs the reduction of trade barriers and the advancement of free trade agreements.

Neoliberalism's detractors contend that the philosophy can exacerbate social injustice, economic inequality, and environmental damage. They argue that, as many global financial crises have demonstrated, less government regulation can lead to market failures and financial instability. Neoliberal proponents contend that market-oriented policies may foster entrepreneurship and innovation while also drawing in investment and accelerating economic growth. They contend that the implementation of neoliberal policies has aided in the economic development of numerous nations and the lifting of a large number of people out of poverty. In general, the effects of neoliberal economic policies differ according to the particular setting in which they are implemented and how well they complement social programs. Global talks about politics and the economy are still shaped by the neoliberal debate.

According to Kopnina (2012) and Crist (2012), social scientists are likewise impacted by the anthropocentric neoliberal ideology that is currently in vogue. It's concerning that the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development neglected to acknowledge or oppose neoliberalism as the

dominant force impeding the advancement of true sustainability (Huckle and Wals, 2015). The Dominant Social Paradigm has been reproduced and accepted as a result of the formal education system's major contribution to societal hegemony (Apple, 2004). Similarly, as Sterling (1996) has shown, higher education confirms rather than questions the Dominant Social Paradigm's rationality. "To reframe and analyse the role of tertiary institutions in a broader sociocultural and historical perspective if tertiary institutions are to be agents in the paradigm shift to sustainability," Dobers, Linderstrom, and Mobjork (2008) concluded.

Figure. 1 illustrates the obstacles to Economics Education Sustainable Development that are influenced by the prevailing societal paradigm.

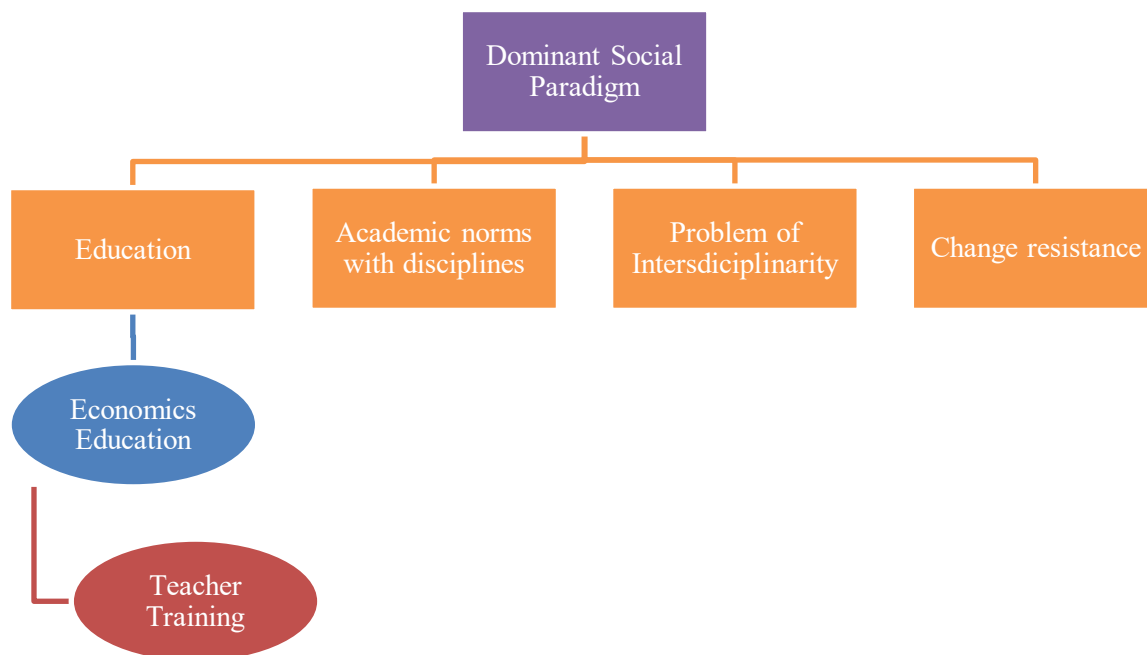


Figure 1: Obstacles to Sustainable Development in Economic Education

Education

Sustainable development is hampered by education in and of itself. According to Scott, Tilbury, Sharp, and Deane (2012), higher education is not doing enough to support education for sustainable development. According to Foley (2020), there are several obstacles standing in the way of a systemic integration of sustainability education in higher education, including:

- a. Ignorance of the concept of sustainability
- b. The higher education system's structure and
- c. Insufficient resources at hand.

Economics Education

Although Economics Education is an essential instrument for advancing sustainable development, it can also operate as a barrier in situations where specific issues are not sufficiently addressed. The following are some ways that economics education could obstruct sustainable development:

- a. **Obsolete Curriculum:** Students' exposure to important sustainability concepts, issues, and solutions may be limited by educational institutions' use of obsolete or inadequate curriculum content on sustainable development.
- b. **Lack of Interdisciplinarity:** As was previously said, an education that places an undue emphasis on subject disciplinarity may make it more difficult for students to comprehend and deal with complex sustainability challenges that call for a multidisciplinary approach.
- c. **Lack of Emphasis on Practical Skills:** The theoretical knowledge that is taught in school may take precedence over the practical skills that are required to apply sustainable practices in everyday life.

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- d. **Assign Resources:** Make sure that enough resources are assigned to sustain sustainable education projects, especially in areas where educational resources are few.

Teacher Training

When teacher education fails to sufficiently train educators to include sustainability issues into their teaching practices, it might operate as a barrier to sustainable development. The following are some ways that difficulties in sustainable development can arise from teacher education:

- a. **Absence of Sustainability Focus:** Teachers may not be prepared to incorporate sustainability into their teaching because teacher education programs may not place a high enough priority on sustainability concepts and practices.
- b. **Insufficient Training on Sustainable Development:** Instructors might not get enough training on sustainability-related subjects, which would make it difficult for them to successfully integrate the concepts of sustainable development into their teaching.
- c. **Academic-Centric Approach:** Programs for teacher preparation may place a strong emphasis on particular subjects and disciplines while ignoring the interdisciplinary character of sustainability and how it crosses academic boundaries.
- d. **Outdated Curriculum:** If teacher education programs don't keep up with the latest innovations in sustainable development, instructors may not be aware of the problems facing sustainability today.
- e. **Inadequate Resources:** It can be difficult to successfully integrate sustainability concepts and pedagogies when teacher education programs lack funding and assistance.
- f. **Opposition to Change:** Educational systems, such as teacher education programs, may be reluctant to adopt new ideas and pedagogies associated with sustainable development in favour of continuing with conventional teaching methods.
- g. **Teacher Attitudes and Views:** It might be difficult to instil sustainability values in their students when teachers have attitudes or views that are in opposition to sustainable development.
- h. **Time Restrictions:** Teachers may find it challenging to keep up with the latest developments in sustainable development since they have little time for professional development.
- i. **Assessment and Evaluation:** It's possible that teacher education's assessment and evaluation procedures do not encourage or acknowledge the incorporation of sustainable ideas into curricula.
- j. **Absence of Role Models:** Educators may lack access to motivating role models who live sustainably and can act as examples of how to integrate sustainability into the classroom.

Academic Disciplines and Norms

Subject discipline can be a powerful economics education tool for overcoming obstacles to sustainable development. The term "subject discipline" describes how education was traditionally organised around certain academic disciplines, with courses being taught separately with no clear linkages between them. This method may make it more difficult for sustainability ideas and practices to be successfully incorporated into the curriculum and may also make it more difficult for students to comprehend and solve complicated sustainability issues.

Subject discipline provides a solid education on obstacles to sustainable development. Discipline has been utilised since the Middle Ages as a means of organising knowledge for instruction and learning, claims Arum (2004). Schools and faculties are organised around disciplines, claims Selby (2006). As stated by Chettiparamab (2007), disciplines uphold rigour and offer the knowledge required by society and the labour market. Disciplines uphold disciplinary intellectual paradigms and give academics an internal framework for professional involvement, identity, and advancement. Profound devotion to a discipline may stifle reflexivity, which may lead to a lack of engagement with real-world issues and the possible suppression of critical inquiry.

Issue with Multidisciplinarity

A scholarly approach known as interdisciplinarity involves using the insights of multiple disciplines to build a more comprehensive understanding by integrating their answers to questions, solving problems,

or addressing topics that are too broad or complex to be adequately addressed by one discipline alone (Repko, 2011). All educational systems have a significant problem as they shift to placing more focus on sustainability, particularly in higher education (Aktas, 2015). Fostering interdisciplinary research and teaching is one practical strategy to raise the importance of sustainability in higher education, claims Aktas (2015). In a similar vein, Foley (2020) has proposed that interdisciplinarity is essential to institutions reevaluating their goals and methods on a deep level. In the end, multidisciplinary inquiry poses the most important query of all. What does education aim to achieve? Interdisciplinarity in its purest form is not a limited skill set, an add-on, or a timetable modification. Rebuilding what is taught and how it is taught is the ultimate objective (Klein in Foley, 2020). According to Meyer, Levesque, Hutchins, Bieluch, Johnson, McGreavy, Dreyer, and Smith (2015), becoming a sustainability specialist requires specialised training that tackles the complex boundaries latent in inter- and transdisciplinary fields. According to Lang, Wiek, Bergmann, Stauffacher, Martens, Moll, Swilling, and Thomas (2012), there is a growing need for transdisciplinary approaches to address key social issues, particularly those about sustainability.

Resistance to Change

One common and important barrier to adopting Economics Education for Sustainable Development is resistance to change. According to Chen and Komph (2012), teacher opposition to curriculum change is the main reason it fails or just achieves surface-level change. When Economics Teachers change, whether it's by implementing new teaching methodologies, technologies, structures, or strategies, they may resist the changes for a variety of reasons if they do not recognise and value the need for change. This is because their interest in preserving the status quo will take precedence over their willingness to accept change. For example:

- a. **Fear of the Unknown:** Since uncertainty is a common side effect of change, economics educators may be concerned about how the changes will affect their daily schedules, jobs, and job security.
- b. **Loss of Control:** When economics educators believe they have little or no influence over decisions, they may be resistant to change and may feel as though they have lost control over their working environment.
- c. **Disruption of Habits and Norms:** When routines and established methods are upset, Economics Teachers may become uneasy and recalcitrant towards novel ideas.
- d. **Lack of Trust:** Economics teachers may be reluctant to support new ideas if there has been a history of failed changes or mistrust between the school administration and the teachers.
- e. **Perceived Inequity:** If Economics educators feel that reforms will unfairly benefit some people or organisations at the expense of others, they may oppose the changes.
- f. **Competing Priorities:** When Economics educators believe a change would add to their workload or divert their attention from more urgent matters, they may be resistant to it.
- g. **Schools' Culture:** It may be difficult to successfully implement change programs in schools with inflexible or resistant cultures.
- h. **Lack of Clear Communication:** Resistance can be fueled by poor communication and explanations of the changes' justifications and expected advantages.
- i. **Loss of Competence:** Teachers of economics who have honed their craft within the current system may worry that new procedures will make them obsolete or less valuable.
- j. **Economic Incentives:** If Economics Teachers believe their financial rewards or incentives will be adversely impacted, they may oppose reform.

Conclusion

To prepare the present and future generations to comprehend the economic aspects of sustainability concerns and to contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and fair world, economics education must be implemented for sustainable development. Educational institutions can play a critical role in producing a generation of knowledgeable and responsible citizens who can help shape a more resilient and sustainable future by implementing Economics Education for Sustainable Development.

The following are some essential factors and actions to take while applying Economics Education for

Sustainable Development:

- a. Redesigning the curriculum will allow for the integration of environmental themes with economic ideas and principles. Modules on resource management, social fairness, environmental economics, sustainable corporate practices, and global economic interconnectedness should be included.
- b. Multidisciplinary Approach: To provide a thorough knowledge of sustainability concerns, adopt a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from numerous disciplines, such as environmental science, sociology, political science, and ethics.
- c. Active Learning: To engage students and foster critical thinking about sustainable economic solutions, use active learning techniques like case studies, simulations, group debates, and real-world projects.
- d. Involving Stakeholders: Invite representatives of non-governmental groups, the business community, and governmental agencies to provide guest lectures, exchange experiences, and provide useful advice on sustainable economic methods.
- e. Emphasise how economic principles can be used in real-world situations to promote sustainable development. Students should be encouraged to create sustainable company plans, evaluate the costs and benefits of sustainability initiatives, and investigate methods for advancing environmental and social responsibility in financial decision-making.
- f. Foster a global perspective by investigating how economic practices and regulations in one nation might affect the environment and communities around the globe.
- g. Teacher Training: Give Economics teachers opportunities for professional development so they can become more knowledgeable about sustainable development and Economics instruction. They will have the abilities needed to instruct and lead conversations on sustainability after completing this.
- h. Cooperation with Institutions: Exchange resources and best practices with other educational institutions and groups engaged in sustainability projects.
- i. Evaluation and Assessment: Make use of assessment instruments to gauge students' comprehension of sustainability ideas and their capacity to apply economic principles to practical sustainability issues.
- j. Partnerships with Industry: To give students access to internship opportunities and practical experience with sustainable economic activities, form partnerships with companies and industries that are dedicated to sustainable practices.
- k. Public Awareness: Through outreach initiatives, lectures, and community involvement, raise public awareness of the value of Economics Education for sustainable development.

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