



## EXPLORING THE SCOPE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN TEXTBOOK OF UPPER PRIMARY LEVEL: A CASE STUDY

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Social innovation is very essential for sustainable development. In the modern world, there are many social and environmental problems and the students should be provided with proper skills and knowledge to critically think and find out solutions to those problems. It can be done by re-organizing the textbooks and curriculum by including topics related with environmental problems and social issues in it. Therefore, this study has been focused to discuss the role of curriculum in education for sustainable development and to find out the scope of sustainable development approach in English textbook of upper primary level. It is a qualitative study of English textbooks of West Bengal Board in upper primary level and the content analysis of these textbooks has been done for the study. The Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022) has emphasized on 17 goals to overcome the global problems. In this study, these goals are taken as parameters to evaluate the English textbooks of upper primary level of West Bengal Board and to find out the extent to which the themes of the lessons in these textbooks relate to the objectives of sustainable development. The various curricular and co-curricular activities at school enable the learners to solve environmental and social problems in real life situations and provide them the idea how to make efforts for creating a sustainable future. After doing the content analysis, it was found that topics and themes related to 6 SDGs among the 17 SDGs were included in these textbooks. There is lack of activities related to real life experiences in them. These textbooks can be more enriched by adopting experiential teaching approaches for making the students learn proper skills and values for preserving and maintaining the society and environment.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Development, Curriculum, English Textbooks*

#### Introduction

The significance of sustainability has been emphasized in modern era for making human beings live in harmony with natural environment and also to preserve the nature and its resources for future generations. According to Brundtland Commission Report (1987), the sustainable development means the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The education for sustainable development makes it possible to acquire the skills and competencies to reflect on social and environmental problems such as poverty, hunger, climate change and environmental degradation and to find solutions of these global problems for shaping a sustainable future (Agbedahin,2018). According to Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022), these problems have increased to an extreme level after the Covid-19 pandemic. The report has put emphasis on strong efforts for achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, 2015 to recover from these global problems and to attain a sustainable future. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of seventeen goals which were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 to address global challenges.

According to UNESCO Report (2012), “Education is a fundamental lever of change contributing to poverty eradication, sustainable development, equity, and inclusiveness. It is also a means of realizing broader social, economic, political and cultural benefits. It empowers all people of all ages with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to shape a better future.” The academic and co-curricular activities at school play a crucial role in providing education for sustainable development to students and it also inculcates sustainable skills and values among them. It is essential to evaluate and re-construct the textbook and curriculum by including activities, topics and themes which will enable students to make efforts to solve environmental and social problems in real life situations. The vocational skills, value education and environmental education should be an integral part of co-curricular activities for providing education for sustainable development to students (Kumari,2016). Curriculum is the totality of learning experience at school including both academic and co-curricular activities. Textbook is a part of curriculum which contains the syllabus which is to be taught at classroom in an organized way (Sarkar, 2016). The aim of the present study

is to analyze the English textbooks of West Bengal Board of Upper Primary Level and to evaluate how these textbooks can be enriched by including topics and activities related to education for sustainable development.

### **Literature Review**

Mohamamdnia & Moghadam (2019) have conducted research on the content of English textbook series developed by Iranian authors through the lenses of Education for sustainability. The findings of this study have revealed that the themes of sustainability are present in these textbooks to a good extent but there should be a more even distribution of such themes throughout the series.

Tatliloglu (2019) has conducted a case study of science curriculum and textbooks in terms of sustainable development goals. According to the result of the study, there were reflected most of SDGs related objective in 8th grade. There were founded at least 6 out of 17 SDGs in each grade. Considering SDGs in three dimensions of sustainable development, environmental dimension was stressed more in SDGs related objectives in the curriculum.

Dixit & Sahrawat (2022) have researched on how the curriculum provisions and teaching-learning strategies influences the education for sustainability. The study showed that teachers' knowledge and attitude about sustainability were limited and non-scientific at times. The study suggests that concerted efforts are required to shape teachers' perspectives towards sustainability.

Jamil, Rasool & Moin (2024) have done a study on sustainability education on English textbook grade VIII based on SNC (2022). The findings revealed that sustainability is not the central theme of the textbook content but various dimensions of sustainability are being promoted through lessons, narratives, and activities.

Imran & Almusharraf (2024) have explored the impact of environmental education on shaping sustainable values and attitudes among students. The result suggests the urgent and significant role of environmental education in preparing children for a secure future. The study emphasizes environmental education as a crucial element for early childhood educational policies.

### **Relevance of the Study**

A textbook is an important resource for learning a subject. It contains the lessons and activities which are to be conducted in classroom. The language textbooks act as a vital resource for inculcating social values and awareness about environment among the students. By reading the stories, poems and plays, the students develop empathy for the deprived and become sensitive towards the society and nature. The NEP (2020) of Government of India places great emphasis on the incorporation of SDGs in curriculum for sensitizing students towards the needs of sustainable development. The NEP (2020) also gives a strong emphasis to experiential learning and to connect the classroom teaching with real life experiences of students. The students can develop a positive attitude towards maintenance of social norms and preservation of environment if the topics related to sustainable development are given in textbooks in a child-centric way along with illustrations and activities in real-life situations. Through this study, the English textbooks of West Bengal Board of Upper Primary Level will be evaluated to find out the extent to which the topics, themes and activities in these textbooks relate to the objectives of sustainable development. This study will help to know how these textbooks can be modified to inspire and sensitize students towards creating a sustainable future.

### **Objectives**

1. To discuss the role of curriculum in education for sustainable development.
2. To evaluate how the content of English textbooks of upper primary level of West Bengal Board can be enriched by the inclusion of topics related to sustainable development.

### **Methodology**

This research is exploratory and qualitative in nature. The English textbooks "Blossoms" of West Bengal Board in the upper primary level standard six, seven and eight has been selected to collect require information. The content analysis method has been done to evaluate how many chapters of the books are reflected to sustainable development goals. 17 SDGs (as per UN Sustainable Development Summit, 2015) was keeping in the mind at the time of content analysis.

### **Discussion**

#### **Objective 1: Role of curriculum in education for sustainable development**

The curriculum is very significant for inculcating sustainable values and attitudes among students. It includes both classroom instruction and co-curricular activities. The themes of stories and poems of English can be taught by integrating them with sustainable objectives. These themes can also be taught by relating them with similar topics in other subjects. It will make students acquire a broad and in-depth knowledge of sustainable values and goals. It will make students learn about sustainable values and goals along with learning English. If the classroom teaching practices are related to real life situations, then the students will develop a practical knowledge about the environmental and social problems. It will inspire them to attain certain values of preserving trees and plants, saving water, helping the deprived people etc. It will make them more sensitive towards the social and environmental problems and inspire them to find out new and innovative solutions to them for creating a better and sustainable future. It will inculcate the values of making a responsible use of natural resources.

#### **Objective 2: Evaluation of English textbooks of upper primary level in the light of sustainable development goals.**

In this study, all the lessons in the English textbooks of West Bengal Board of upper primary level are evaluated in the light of SDGs (2015).

### **i) No Poverty**

- **Class-VI, Lesson – 7**

In the story ‘The Magic Fish Bone’, a situation is shown when the king becomes miserable because of lack of money and his daughter helped him to overcome the problem by using the magic fish bone given by fairy at the right time. It will inspire the students how to overcome misery and adversity by being brave and doing things at right time. These lines from the story reflect the theme of poverty:

“Have you no money at all, Papa?” Alicia enquired.

“None, my child.”

“Is there no way left of getting any, Papa?”

“No way,” said the King. “I have tried very hard, and I have tried all ways.” (p. 72)

These words of Alicia told to the King suggest her presence of mind:

“When we have done our best, Papa, and that is not enough, then I think the right time must have come for asking the help of others.” (p. 73)

After saying this, Alicia took out from her pocket the magic fish bone and wished that it was the salary day and immediately the King’s salary came rattling down the chimney and their poverty was ended.

- **Class-VII, Lesson – 4**

In this story ‘The Beauty and the Beast’, a rich merchant loses his wealth in a storm and becomes poor. These lines from the text reflect the theme of poverty and struggle for survival:

“The merchant lost all his wealth in a tempest on sea. So, he and his daughter started to live in a small farmhouse in a village. They had to work hard for their living.” (p. 32)

- **Class-VIII, Lesson – 8**

In the play ‘The Happy Prince’, the statue of Happy Prince is sad because of miserable condition of people in his land. He gives the sapphires of his eyes and all the gold from his body to the poor people of his land. These are some lines spoken by the statue of Happy Prince to the bird Swallow and it reflects his concern for the poor:

“The woman is poor and her son is suffering from fever. Swallow, take the ruby from my sword-hilt and give it to her.” (p. 73)

“I see a poor little girl in the town square. She has no shoes. Little Swallow, please give her the sapphire remaining in my other eye.” (p. 76)

### **ii) Zero Hunger**

- **Class-VIII, Lesson - 8:** In the play ‘The Happy Prince’, in a scene the beggars are shown who have no food, cloths and shelter. The statue of Happy Prince tells the Swallow to distribute all the gold from his body to them. In the next scene, those beggars are shown as wearing good cloths, looking better, eating and laughing. By reading the play, the students can develop an idea how the poor and hungry people can be helped. These lines from the text show how the statue of Happy Prince becomes sad for those beggars.

“Swallow: I saw many unhappy and unfed people.

Statue: Take all the gold from my body and give it to the poor people.” (p. 77)

### **iii) Gender Equality**

- **Class-VII, Lesson - 1:** The text ‘Book of Nature’ is an excerpt from ‘Letters from a Father to his daughter’ written by Jawaharlal Nehru to his daughter Indira Gandhi. While reading the text, the students can be made aware that Indira Gandhi was the first woman PM of India. It will make them know how women can acquire high positions like men.
- **Class-VII, Lesson - 12:** The text is an excerpt taken from the book ‘Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl’ by Anne Frank. While going through the text, the students can be made aware of the fact how this book describes Anne’s life as an adolescent girl when she and her family were hiding from the Nazis during the World War II. It will make the students know about the suffering of Anne’s family during those difficult times through Anne’s perspective. It will inspire the girls to remain brave in hard and difficult times and to reflect on their own feelings and experiences by keeping a narrative of life.

### **iv) Clean Water and Sanitation**

- **Class-VI, Lesson – 8**

‘Goodbye to the Moon’ is a science fiction story in which the author was born on moon 15 years back. The scarcity of water on the moon is one of the themes in the story. While returning to the Earth with his father, the author was surprised to see that the Earth was covered with water. These lines from the text will make the students learn about the value of water: “On Moon, water was harder to get than oxygen. We had to pay for every ounce of it.” (p. 82)

- **Class-VIII, Lesson – 2**

In the story ‘Clouds’, a small boy was searching for clouds. There was no rainfall during the rainy season. One day, he was walking a long distance under the fierce heat. Suddenly, he found a Persian Wheel and got a sense of relief after drinking water from it. These lines from the text show how the boy was exhausted by walking under the fierce heat of the Sun: “His body was on fire, his throat dry... he saw a large tree in whose shade a Persian Wheel turned gently. It

was like he had reached an oasis in a middle of a desert... Then he washed his hands and face and drank his fill.” (p. 19). The story will make students know about the problems of lack of rainfall and water crisis.

- **Class-VIII, Lesson – 13**

In ‘The Man Who Planted Trees’, the narrator goes for a hike in a barren and dry land. He was searching for water but he did not get it. These lines from the text reflect the crisis of water in that place:

“These ruined houses of the village made me think that there must, at one time, have been a spring or a well there. There was indeed a spring but it was dry. All life has disappeared.” (p. 115)

By reading the story, the students will know how the crisis of water can make a place deserted.

**v) Reduced Inequalities**

- Class-VII, Lesson - 9: The text ‘J.C. Bose: A Beautiful Mind’ is about the life of A.J.C. Bose and the discoveries made by him. These lines in the text taken from the speech of A.J.C. Bose during Bikrampur Conference (2015) show how A.J.C. Bose sat with a Muslim boy and a fisherman’s son when he studied at school:

“...In the vernacular school, to which I was sent, the son of the Muslim attendant of my father sat on my right side, and the son of a fisherman sat on my left...It was because of my childhood friendship with them that I could never feel that there were ‘creatures’ who might be labelled ‘low-caste’...” (p. 88)

- Class-VIII, Lesson - 8: In the play ‘The Happy Prince’, the statue of Happy Prince sacrifices everything for the poor and deprived people of his land. It puts emphasis on theme of sacrifice and having empathy for the suffering and poor people. It depicts the inequality in a society and through the text the students will get an idea how the inequality can be reduced by helping the deprived people.

**vi) Climate Action**

- Class-VII, Lesson – 8

‘The Story of Proserpine’ is a mythological story in which Ceres, the goddess of crops and plants, neglected all her duties on Earth as she was searching for her lost daughter Proserpine. As a result of it, the land became dry and barren and famine broke out everywhere. These lines from the text reflect the dire consequences of famine:

“As a result, crops failed everywhere. The ground became dry and barren...The people were starving.” (p. 77)

By reading the story, the students will know about the effects of natural disasters such a famine.

- Class-VII, Lesson - 11: In the story ‘The Axe’, there are themes of urbanization and deforestation. These lines spoken to Velan, the old gardener, by the son of his master show how a beautiful garden is destroyed for making a housing complex by a company:

“...The house is sold to a company. They are not going to have a garden. They are going to build small houses by the score without leaving space even for a blade of grass.” (p. 107)

- Class-VIII, Lesson - 2: In the story ‘Clouds’, the boy meets with an old man who tells him that he once lived in a place where it had not rained for 10 years. By reading the conversation between the boy and the old man, the students will know about the effects of lack of rainfall and water crisis and how they are related with climate change. (“The old man...He was open-mouthed.”, p. 21).

- Class-VIII, Lesson - 13: In ‘The Man Who Planted Trees’, the narrator went on a long hike to a desolated area. The people had left that place because of lack of water and vegetation in that region. These lines from the text show the lack of trees in that region and the efforts of Elzeard Bouffier to remedy the situation:

“He had concluded that this country was dying for lack of trees.” (p. 119) “He told me that for three years now he had been planting trees in this solitary way.” (p. 119). Elzeard Bouffier had planted thousands of oak trees in that barren land. This story will inspire the students to plant and save trees for reducing the effects of climate change.

**Table 1: Class wise distribution of sustainable development goals**

Class	Lesson Number	Sustainable Development Goals					
		Goal 1. No Poverty	Goal 2. Zero Hunger	Goal 5. Gender Equality	Goal 6. Clean Water & Sanitation	Goal 10. Reduced Inequalities	Goal 13. Climate Action
VI	7	✓					
	8				✓		
VII	1			✓			
	4	✓					
	8						✓
	9					✓	
	11						✓
	12			✓			

VIII	2				✓		✓
	8	✓	✓			✓	
	13				✓		✓
Total number of Chapters	3	1	2	3	2	4	

### Suggestions

- Activities related to preserving environment such as planting trees, saving water, making charts on effects of cutting trees etc. should be given.
- More activities for inculcating sustainable skills and values should be included for developing a sense of responsibility among students to protect the environment and society.
- Real life examples should be included for developing clear idea about environmental and social problems.
- Experiential teaching approaches should be included to expand the idea and knowledge of students.
- Activities related to problem solving in a collaborative way should be given.
- The textbook should develop positive attitude among students towards environment.
- More topics related to love for nature and its creatures should be included.
- Activities related to creativity and real-life experience related to nature and environment should be given.
- Topics and activities should be included for developing the feeling of sympathy for others and observing the social norms.
- There should be a more even distribution of SDGs in the English textbooks of Upper Primary Level.
- Activities such as school field trips to national parks or environmental places should be included.
- The textbooks contain only topics and themes related to 6 SDGs. The other SDGs which are relevant for the upper primary level such as saving the life of animals in land and also the aquatic life below water, maintaining peace, justice and equality in society should be included.
- The textbooks should contain activities for classroom discussions and different types of games related to sustainable goals.

### Conclusion

The English Textbooks of Upper Primary Level of West Bengal Board contain the themes related to 6 SDGs among the 17 SDGs. The themes related to these 6 SDGs are reflected in grade VIII to the greatest extent. These themes and topics will make students critically think about social problems and environment related issues. More activities related to protecting the environment should be included and more real-life examples about the relevant social issues should be provided to students for properly developing their values, skills, knowledge and competencies to solve environmental and social problems. Experiential teaching approaches should be adopted for making the students aware how to solve complex problems in life and how to take initiatives for making the world sustainable in future.

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