The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal. Special Issue, Summer 2025. 377-379
Published by: Pather Dabi Educational Trust, (Regn No: IV-1402-00064/2023), Under Govt. of West Bengal, India

The Social Science Review
A Multidisciplinary Journal
ISSN: 2584-0789
(Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International e-Journal)
Homepage: www.tssreview.in

SUSTAINABLE SKILLS FOR A CHANGING WORLD: A LIFELONG JOURNEY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

In an era of rapid technological advancements and environmental challenges, sustainable skills have emerged as critical for both personal and societal resilience. This article explores "Sustainable Skills for a Changing World: A Lifelong Journey," emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and adaptability. Drawing from a comprehensive review of the literature, the article highlights key sustainable skills, including critical thinking, digital literacy, environmental awareness, and emotional intelligence, as fundamental to thriving in a dynamic global landscape. Scholars such as Billett (2010) and Kolb (2015) emphasize that lifelong learning fosters adaptability and innovation, enabling individuals to respond effectively to evolving challenges. Additionally, research by UNESCO (2020) underscores the role of sustainable education in promoting environmental stewardship and social equity. By integrating interdisciplinary insights, the article examines how lifelong learning initiatives can empower individuals to acquire sustainable skills while fostering community resilience. This study also identifies challenges, including digital divides and access disparities, which hinder widespread participation in lifelong learning. Solutions proposed include inclusive policies, digital access initiatives, and community-driven learning models to bridge these gaps. Ultimately, the article advocates for a paradigm shift where education systems prioritize sustainable skill-building as a core component of curricula. By aligning individual growth with sustainable practices, lifelong learning becomes a powerful tool for addressing global challenges, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable future.

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250307066

Keywords: *Sustainable skills, lifelong learning, adaptability, environmental awareness, critical thinking, digital literacy, resilience, UNESCO, inclusive education*

Introduction

The 21st century brings in new industrialization, environmental issues, social changes, etc. All these demands a person to learn and adapt continuously towards success. Versatility in the fast-changing global landscape is always in demand. Thus, societies as well as individuals need to be able to embrace sustainable skills that allow for better resilience and long-term success. Sustainable skills include those such as critical thinking, digital literacy, awareness of the environment, and emotional intelligence abilities, which make the individual better at solving tough problems and contributing meaningfully to society.

Lifelong learning has emerged as one of the biggest cornerstones by which one develops life and professionalism to stay relevant in such an age. Billett, 2010 and Kolb, 2015 agree with the argument on the contribution that lifelong learning impacts innovation toward the realization of new opportunities, and threats as well as adjustment to stay relevant. Sustainable education is according to UNESCO 2020 advocating for environment stewardship and social equity. Despite all the overwhelming advantages of sustainability in skill acquisition, there are considerable challenges that range from digital divides to educational disparities and thereby restrict broad participation by people in lifelong learning initiatives.

This paper evaluates the sustainable skills approach, focusing more on flexibility and resistance. It has a comprehensive literature review in regard to the core competencies needed for the new world, barriers to lifelong learning, and proposals for some solutions to issues of access gaps. Consequently, this research study will call for the integration of sustainable skill development into educational systems for an egalitarian and sustainable future.

Objectives

Some of the major goals of this paper are –

1. Discussion of sustainable skills and implications for personal and social resilience.
2. Scrutiny of the value of life-long learning in the acquisition and sustenance of sustainable skills.
3. Discussion of some critical sustainable skills that include thinking critically, being digitally literate, environmentally aware, and emotionally intelligent.

4. Review of scholarly opinion regarding life-long learning and sustainable education.
5. Digital divide and access as a challenge toward sustainable education.

Introduction to Sustainable Skills and Lifelong Learning

Sustainable skills are comprehensive competencies that enable an individual to adapt to technological change and environmental changes. According to Billett (2010), lifelong learning is inescapable in the dynamic world of today. Kolb (2015) indicates that experiential learning is the foundation that results in sustainable skills because continued practice in the real world needs interaction with the existing challenges.

According to UNESCO, 2020, sustainable education is a way of enhancing stewardship of the environment and social equity. The organization asserts that lifelong learning should be the core of education policies, preparing learners to learn new skills for sustainability. On the same note, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, are quality education (Goal 4) and climate action (Goal 13). This implies that education systems should focus on the development of sustainable competencies (UNESCO, 2020).

Critical Sustainable Skills of the 21st Century

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Critical thinking is a basic skill, which gives a person the competency to judge information, what risks exist, and make rational judgments. Facione (2011) defines critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment to be employed toward solving intricate problems of verdict on issues of value encompassing scientific evidence. According to Van Dijk (2020), developing the development of critical thinking skills in curriculums of education develops analytical ability greatly needed for innovation and resilience.

Digital Literacy

The rapid growth of technology makes digital literacy not a luxury but a necessity. Buckingham (2013) describes digital literacy as the ability to effectively navigate, evaluate, and create digital content. The European Commission (2018) reported that digital skills are important for employment, social inclusion, and active citizenship. However, the most significant barrier to the digital divide is the lack of access to technology, especially in low-income communities, as suggested by Van Dijk (2020).

Environmental Awareness and Sustainability

Environmental education ensures sustainability. Sustainability literacy, as coined by Sterling, is awareness of ecological concerns and making a thoughtful decision for the environment. According to the study of Orr, when it forms part of the curricula, students will be sensitive towards their ecological responsibility and environmental awareness.

Emotional Intelligence and Social Resilience

Emotional intelligence is yet another sought-after competency in a transforming world. Goleman (1995) defined EI as the ability to recognize and understand emotions and to act on this knowledge appropriately. EI has been linked with effective decision-making, conflict resolution, and leadership skills. Cherniss (2010) demonstrated that EI enhances adaptability and resilience, both of which are essential to overcome social challenges.

Lifelong Learning in Sustainable Education

Billett (2010) has underscored that lifelong learning provides for flexibility and creativity as the means of effective management of dynamic problems. Kolb's experiential learning theory, in 2015, represents the learning experience constructed through experience, reflection, and practice. Analogously, transformative learning theory outlines the process of critical reflection to construct new ways of thought and problem-solving abilities.

UNESCO, 2020 supports lifelong learning towards a better pursuit of equity and inclusiveness. These may include some vocational education, community-based learning, online learning networks, etc. Four pillars in education are learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be. They have been evaluated under lifelong learning.

Barriers to Sustainable Education Implementation

Digital Divide and Technological Challenges

The first lifelong learning barrier is the digital divide. According to Van Dijk (2020), unequal access to digital resources prevents the marginalized from learning. The OECD (2021) shows that educational inequality is amplified by digital inequality since the deprived cannot acquire digital skills.

Economic and Social Barriers

Financial problems also do not help with lifelong learning. Education and training do not come cheap, whereby this makes it exclusive to many poor people. Other social barriers most relate to gender inequality as well as cultural differences that discourage participation in lifelong learning programs (UNESCO, 2020).

Institutional and Policy Challenges

Most of the modern systems of education do not practice the new alternative models that seek to enhance learning by the skill of sustainability. Biesta, 2011 asserts that the fixed curriculum and assessment system are the initiators of innovativeness in schools. Therefore, the policymakers must develop models of learning that support flexibility and competency of sustainability.

Proposed Solutions and Policy Recommendations

Inclusive Policies and Digital Access Initiatives
The policies toward the promotion of digital inclusion ought to be crafted by governments and institutions. Under this concern, the European Commission (2018) invested in digital aside from Internet free or almost free as their recommendation. Meanwhile, easier accessibility to sources for digital learning might be seen within a public-private mage.

Community-Led Learning Methods
Community-based learning models provide a sustainable way of skill development. Wenger (1998) states that communities of practice are important for sharing knowledge and collaborative learning. Local initiatives such as workshops and mentorship can fill the gap between theoretical learning and practice.

Sustainability in Curricula Integration
The curricula of educational systems should incorporate sustainability-oriented education that fosters critical thinking, digital literacy, and awareness regarding the environment. It would also be found that students are much more engaged and effective through interdisciplinary approaches, for example, project-based learning and experiential education.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is required to prepare persons to deal with the problems of the 21st century as it endows them with the right competencies amidst the shifting world. Therefore, in areas facing these challenges of digital divides and economic barriers, inclusive policies for gaining access to the digital environment and community-based models of learning can be an important tool. In this respect, sustainable education can help encourage resilience, innovation, and fair growth in society. On a long-term scale, the inclusion of sustainable skill-building in education systems is not only necessary but also a step toward transforming the future toward greater sustainability and inclusiveness.

Acknowledgment: No
Author's Contribution: *Supriya Konai:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing.
Funding: No
Declaration: Not Applicable
Competing Interest: No

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