

Role of Teacher Education Institutions in Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Values

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The TEIs assume a central crossroads of the quest in the world towards sustainable and equitable societies. Being the major players in educating the future teachers, their curriculum, pedagogical approach, and organizations cultures in essence determine the way the new generation of educators perceives and adopts inclusion and sustainability. In this paper, the authors will look at the complex role played by TEIs in fostering inclusive sustainable values. It posits that in order to achieve the real goal of education to propel the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), TEIs should go beyond theoretical outlay to adopt transformative and justice-focused strategies. This paper addresses the conceptual foundations of inclusive education (IE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and shows that the two have a synergistic nature, through a systematic review of the literature. It outlines major TEI objectives such as curriculum redesign, transformative teaching, inclusive practice in institutions, community, and teacher empowerment. The main hypothesis is that TEIs that incorporate ESD and IE in a logical, justice-oriented model will bring up teachers who will be much more effective and dedicated to developing an inclusive and sustainable classroom and community, thus a multiplier effect of societal change. The conclusion highlights the necessity of TEIs as living examples of the values they profess, and it needs a fundamental change in the policy, practice, and evaluation to achieve their potential as vehicles to a more just and sustainable future.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Teacher Education Institutions, Sustainable Development, UNESCO, Curriculum Integration.

Introduction

The 21st century is characterized by the global interconnected challenges: intensified socio-economic inequalities, environmental degradation, the climate crisis and endemic exclusion due to ability, gender, ethnicity and other identity markers. In its turn, the international systems, including the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development developed by United Nations, present education as an initial driving force of change (UNESCO, 2017). As a matter of duty, it is upon us to identify two paradigms of pedagogy that have taken up center stage in this academic venture; Inclusive Education (IE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). IE supports the idea of eliminating barriers to participation and learning among all students and appreciating diversity as a resource (UNESCO, 2009). ESD also enables students to make sound judgments and make

responsible choices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible, and based on a just society, to the current and future generations (UNESCO, 2014).

Although these agendas are usually promoted individually, it is important that they intersect. Without social justice and inclusion, sustainability is impossible, and inclusive societies are more resilient and sustainable by their nature (Slee, 2018). It is left to teachers to translate these grand global agendas into reality in the classroom, however, and it is too much to ask. Teachers are the final judges of pedagogy, classroom atmosphere and interpretation of curriculum. Their attitudes, beliefs and competencies make a classroom truly inclusive or whether sustainability is taught as an important and not superficial notion of action.

This fact puts Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) which include universities,

colleges, and training centers in a deeper precarious position of responsibility and influence. TEIs are the practices through which teacher identity and professional practice are made. Thus, their work is much more than simply instilling technical skills; they must promote values, critical consciousness, and transformational agency that would enable educators to work in complex and diverse classrooms and solve the acute socio-ecological problems (Evans et al., 2017). In this paper, the author believes that TEIs are not only providers of skilled manpower but key players of the wider project of transforming the society towards sustainability and equity. This study identifies a way in which TEIs can play this critical role by using their potential and current challenges as the guide.

Objectives

The main aims of this research paper include the following:

1. Compare the conceptual synergies between Inclusive Education (IE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as the dominant value systems of education in the 21st century.
2. Research the specific functions and roles of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the inculcation of such values in pre-service and in-service teacher education.
3. Trace and comment on some of the most important strategies of TEIs such as curriculum integration, pedagogical innovation and inclusive institutional praxis.

4. Aim to explore the obstacles and issues TEIs have in their endeavour to foster inclusive and sustainable values.

5. Suggest a teacher education framework that will integrate institutional policy and curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment with the objectives of inclusion and sustainability.

Review of Literature

Imagining Inclusive Education and Education to Sustainable Development.

Inclusive Education (IE) has developed out of a major aim to allow students with disabilities to be integrated into mainstream environments to a larger philosophy that seeks to accommodate the various needs of all learners by eliminating the barriers in the physical, social, pedagogical, and attitudinal context (Ainscow, 2020). It is founded on rights-based models, including the UN Convention on the Rights of people with disabilities (2006), and social justice theories, which dispute discriminatory practices. IE does not consider learner diversity as an issue to be addressed and instead sees it as an opportunity to enhance learning to all participants (Florian and Spratt, 2013).

Education to Sustainable Development (ESD) has also evolved since its early focus on environmental education into a comprehensive, interdisciplinary model of sustainability, which is a complex, interdependent concept, in relation to the environment, society, and economy. Critical ESD emphasizes the importance of systems thinking, scenario planning in the future and the acquisition of competencies including critical thinking, teamwork, and self-

knowledge (Wiek et al., 2011). It is normative in nature which encourages values of justice, responsibility and planetary boundaries (Sterling, 2010).

The point of intersection between IE and ESD lies in the fact that they all believe in equity, justice, and collective well-being. Both are revolutionary agendas that aim to change thinking, organizations and practice. According to Slee (2018), such a society is not sustainable because it is a waste of human potential and creates conflict. On the other hand, the sustainability mindset requires an integrative ethic that puts into consideration the interest of the marginalized groups and the unborn. This synergy implies that in teacher education, IE and ESD cannot be considered independent, stand-alone, modules that can be added on but rather the overlapping lenses where all the educational theory and practice must be seen.

Teacher Education Institutions: A Lever that is Critical

The studies indicate that educators tend to be unprepared to use not only IE but also ESD in their practice and refer to the shortage of training, materials, and self-confidence (Sharma and Sokal, 2016; Evans et al., 2017). This gap refers to the preparatory aspect of TEIs. According to scholars, the TEIs need to change their transmission model of teacher training into transformative model of teacher training (Mezirow, 2000; Sterling, 2010).

Transformative teacher education presupposes:

Critical Reflection: The pre-service teachers are encouraged to take a closer look at their own preconceptions, assumptions, and privilege (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Justice-Oriented Pedagogy: Tracing beyond diversity management approaches to participatory classroom democracy models that contest the structural injustices of the system (Hackman, 2005).

Systems Thinking: Allowing educators to realize the interdependence between local and global problems, and educating students with the same approach (Wiek et al., 2011).

To give rise to this, TEIs must internalize these values. This implies that the admissions policies, physical structures, diversity of the faculty, and campus culture ought to have statements about the commitment to inclusion and sustainability (Leal Filho et al., 2019). TEIs are also supposed to be living laboratories or microcosms of the societies they aspire to have.

TEIs Strategies and Approaches

According to literature, there are a number of promising strategies:

Curriculum Integration ESD and IE principles should be infused into all courses plus foundational studies in subjects (education psychology, sociology, philosophy) instead of being restricted to specialist electives (UNESCO, 2018).

Transformative Pedagogies: The approach consists of participatory, dialogic, inquiry-based and experiential learning methods, such as community-based projects, ecological footprint audit, and collaborative action

research with a variety of school communities (Taylor et al., 2019).

Partnerships: Establishing sound and equitable alliances with both inclusive schools and special education centers, environmental agencies, and indigenous communities to offer authentic and contextually based field experiences (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

Evaluating Values and Competencies: Building is necessary to create assessment models where academic knowledge is not valued but also the process of empathy, ethical reasoning, collaboration skills, and action-taking (McClam and Sevier, 2010).

Persistent Challenges

However, despite theoretical clarity, there are still major obstacles. They are the presence of overcrowded and inflexible teacher education programs resistant to change; faculty expertise deficit and lack of professional development in ESD/IE; neoliberal policy contexts that prioritize the results of standardized tests over holistic and value-based education; and the natural inability to measure the transformative processes and internalization of values (Mutton et al., 2018; Slee, 2018). Moreover, the transformative work of single TEIs can be secluded and short-term unless the governments contribute to it with supportive policy frameworks and resources.

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of the current paper is as follows: The Teacher Education Institutions that appoint the principles of the Inclusive Education and Education for

Sustainable Development systematically and cohesively with the help of a transformative framework based on the principles of justice will help to develop graduate teachers that are significantly more likely to demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy, critical consciousness, and pedagogical competence in the promotion of the inclusive and sustainable learning process. This, in its turn, will result in a strong multiplier effect, the more equitable, just, and sustainable results in schools and the community in general.

Conclusion

Teacher Education Institutions have a special and strong mandate in the process of achieving inclusive and sustainable societies. The ideas of IE and ESD, as has been argued in this paper, are not marginal aspects of the educational theory, but core and interrelated systems of values that need to reinstate the mainstream reason of teaching and learning in the Anthropocene. TEIs are thus not meant to add new material, but they are also considered to be involved in a deep process of reorienting education towards justice, equity and planetary stewardship.

To perform this role, it is necessary to have a paradigm shift in TEIs themselves. They need to move away from the traditional training colleges to become transformational learning communities. This includes a radical redesign of curriculum to integrate inclusion and sustainability into all course work; the implementation of pedagogical practices themselves inclusive and enabling agency; the creation of meaningful partnership with different communities, and, most importantly,

relations to the values they preach. A TEI that preaches sustainability and has a huge carbon footprint, or that upholds inclusivity and non-disability but cannot be accessed or is not faculty-diverse is counterproductive.

The obstacles to this change are high and are rooted in structural, political, and attitudinal obstacles. It takes bold leadership, long term investment, and accommodating national and international levels of policy to overpower them. It also requires a solid research agenda that is aimed at testing the effects of various teacher education models on graduate practice and ultimately on student outcomes.

The advocacy of inclusive and sustainable values is no incidental add-on to teacher education, but its 21st -century purpose. Through this revolutionary role, TEIs have the potential to create a ripple effect as generations of teachers can create a classroom in which all learners will feel appreciated and prepared to transform a more fair and sustainable world. The road is complicated, and the message is unmistakable: the future that we want to live in starts in the classrooms of the teacher education of the present day.

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