AN ANALYTICAL EXAMINATION OF DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION WHILE CREATING CHANCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

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ABSTRAT

Goal 4—sustainable development—is recognized as a separate aim. Given the severe impact of COVID-19 on the sector, leading to educational setbacks in four out of the five examined countries, it is no longer feasible to advance towards high-quality education at the previous slow rate. By 2030, both high-quality postsecondary education and elementary and secondary education should be accessible for all boys and girls at no cost. It is essential to eliminate gender and economic inequalities and to ensure fair access to affordable vocational training. Many other Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.G.s) depend on education for their achievement. Individuals can break free from the cycle of poverty when they receive a quality education. Education is a key factor in achieving gender equality and reducing inequality. Moreover, it enhances and extends the quality of life for everyone. Beyond fostering individual acceptance, education also plays a role in building more peaceful communities. To achieve Goal 4, it is crucial to prioritize education funding at the national level. Implementing strategies such as guaranteeing free public education, expanding the teacher workforce, enhancing the fundamental infrastructure of schools, and embracing digital transformation are also vital.

Keywords: digital transformation, high-quality education, and sustainable development goals.

INTRODUCTION

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (UNESCO Citation 2020) concentrated on Inclusion and Education, highlighting that inclusion is challenging to define, as it can be viewed as both a process and an outcome (inputs, outputs, or results). This difficulty in establishing a single definition for inclusive education reflects its intricate, multifaceted, and evolving characteristics. The GEM Report (UNESCO Citation 2020, 11) defines inclusive education as ' … a process: actions and practices that accept diversity and foster a sense of belonging, grounded in the belief that every individual has worth and potential and deserves respect.' This definition aligns with the viewpoint presented in this special issue, where we advocate for a more profound examination of the processes and values that support inclusive education systems in various contexts, rather than proposing a singular definition of inclusive education. We have aimed to move beyond the conceptual deadlock that discussions and debates surrounding inclusive education often encounter, where the focus tends to be on the type of educational setting, whether special or mainstream, instead of emphasizing the quality and purpose of the education being offered. For millions of children around the world, school is not only a place to learn, but as Covid-19 has highlighted, school is a safe place, where children receive free meals, and health and nutrition services such as vaccinations, deworming and iron supplementation, and also access other medicals services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and so on. An estimated 379 million children missed out on school meals because of school closures during the pandemic **(UNICEF Citation2021),**

which are an important lever to boost school enrolment, attendance and completion, and learning outcomes **(World Food Programme Citation2019). McClain-Nhlapo et al. (Citation2020)** note that prolonged closures of schools can have dire consequences for children worldwide and can disproportionately impact children with disabilities.

The SDGs, unlike the **Millennium Development Goals (UN Citation2000),** are universal and apply to all countries rather than being seen as important and intended for action only in relation to developing economies. This echoing of a collective commitment and vision also acknowledges that there is still much to be done in relation to addressing issues of inequity globally, within the sphere of education, alongside all other areas. Education, when viewed through the lens of quality, relevance and meaningfulness, is an opportunity with the potential to transform lives.

In September 2015, nations gathered to endorse the vision of 'Transforming our World', presenting a unified agenda, 'a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity' (UN Citation2015, 3). This agenda, which serves as the basis for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), prominently addresses themes of equity, inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity, and non-discrimination. It aspires to create a 'world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection' (UN Citation 2015, 5). The articulation of Goal 4 within the SDGs reinforces this dedication by emphasizing the necessity to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (19). The inclusive education movement has developed in various ways across different nations. According to Kozleski, Artiles, and Waitoller (Citation2011), countries can be categorized as first-generation or second-generation inclusive education nations, with first-generation countries generally having a historical dedication to inclusive education that predates the Salamanca Statement, a trend that began to emerge in certain nations as early as the 1960s. Although not every first-generation country possesses this extensive history, they all share the characteristic of being relatively affluent in economic terms. This notion of 'false universalism' (Nguyen et al. 2009, 109) regarding inclusive education has increasingly been questioned by a deeper recognition of the need to contextualize inclusive education across various environments, in order to understand how it is represented and understood in both policy and practice (Artiles, Kozleski, and Waitoller 2011; Mitchell 2005; Rose 2010). The effect of enforcing this 'global standard' regarding the concept of inclusive education (Urwick and Elliot Citation2010, 137) has often been demonstrated to lead to skewed policy and practice advancements in African and Asian nations, with minimal consideration of local knowledge and expertise (Mukhopadhyay Citation2015; Singal and Muthukrishna Citation2014).

Summarised, SDG4:

1. Providing opportunities for lifelong learning to all individuals, from young children to adults.

2. Guaranteeing fairness, inclusiveness, and parity for females.

3. Ensuring effective learning is used to obtain relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities.

4. Ensuring that, in a multicultural and interconnected society, education is still helpful regarding technical and vocational skills for respectable work and global citizenship.

B. **The three guiding concepts of SDG4 are:**

In addition to serving as a facilitator, education is a fundamental human right. All nations must recognize the right. Unalienable are the rights of human beings to instruction. To fulfil

this promise, countries must ensure that the education and learning process is inclusive, equitable, high-quality, and free from discrimination based on a person's gender, ability, social background, or financial status. Beyond achieving full human potential, education aims to develop friendship, understanding, tolerance, and peace among people. In addition to imparting the skills necessary to collaborate critically and creatively with others, education should cultivate resilience, curiosity, and fearlessness and teach them the foundations of reading, writing, and maths.

The government is responsible for delivering education as it is considered a public good. Public policy develops from the collaborative efforts of communities, families, educators, and students, demonstrating that education is a collective social pursuit. The responsibility of the state is to establish and uphold standards and norms.

The rights to education and gender equality for all individuals are interrelated. To attain gender equality via a rights-based approach, it is essential to provide equal empowerment opportunities for both men and women, as well as for boys and girls, across all levels of education and beyond. Sustainable Development Goal 4 includes seven outcome targets and three strategies for implementation. Since 2015, G.C.E. has focused its advocacy and policy efforts on the ten Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Free elementary and secondary education is provided by the public

By 2030, guarantee that every child has access to free and high-quality primary and secondary education that satisfies their requirements and yields reliable, consistent learning results. This indicates that education provided by the state should be equitable, inclusive, and of the highest caliber for every individual throughout the full twelve-year duration. There needs to be a minimum of nine years out of the twelve before any significant learning impacts can be observed.

2. Universal pre-primary education and early childhood development

Promoting lifelong learning among individuals and youth while eliminating hurdles to higher education, especially those linked to institutions, is essential. These challenges should be tackled through technical and vocational education (TVET) starting in secondary education. Recent global accords indicate that higher education should ultimately be available at no cost.

4. The skills necessary for respectable work

By the year 2030, greatly increase the proportion of both adults and young people possessing the technical and vocational skills necessary for employment, honorable careers, and entrepreneurial endeavors.

What it suggests

- **Access**: To ensure quality, there is a need for greater and fairer access to TVET. Employing a range of teaching and training methods will enhance and broaden the available learning opportunities.

- **Acquiring abilities**: The capacity to creatively solve problems, think critically, work cooperatively, communicate well, and manage conflicts exemplifies higher-level cognitive and non-cognitive/transferable skills that should be prioritized over specific job-related skills.

5. Taking into account and advancing gender equality

By the year 2030, ensure that the gender disparity in education is eliminated and that marginalized groups, including children in unstable situations, people with disabilities, and indigenous communities, receive equal access to all educational and career opportunities.

• **Parity of sexes**: High-quality education and equitable benefits should be accessible to all individuals, regardless of gender, so they can achieve similar levels of success. Extra support is essential for teenage girls and young women, as they are more likely to experience poverty, live in remote areas, face early marriages, become young mothers, and suffer from gender-based violence. Particular attention should also be given to boys who find themselves in challenging circumstances. Gender equality initiatives are most effective when combined with broader efforts to eliminate child labor, promote accountable governance, ensure justice, and improve health.

6. All Young People Should Read

By 2030, every child, along with a substantial proportion of adult males and females, will possess literacy and numeracy skills. Worldwide, every adult and young person should have reached recognized standards of functional literacy and numeracy proficiency by 2030, similar to that acquired upon completing primary education. The objective's framework is designed to accomplish this goal.

7. Education for global citizenship and sustainable development

Empower every student to contribute to sustainable development by 2030, equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills. This includes fostering peaceful and nonviolent societies, as well as educating children about gender equality, human rights, and sustainable ecological practices. It also encompasses nurturing a sense of global citizenship, valuing cultural diversity, and recognizing the role of culture in promoting sustainable development.

D. Methods of operation

We must take into account gender issues, the needs of children, and the requirements of individuals with disabilities when building or upgrading educational institutions to ensure inclusive, safe, nonviolent, and effective learning environments for everyone.

1. Grants

Constructing or renovating educational facilities requires careful consideration of gender dynamics, children, and individuals with disabilities to create inclusive, calm, safe, and effective learning environments for everyone.

2. Awards

By 2020, kindly enhance the number of scholarships offered to emerging countries to facilitate their access to postsecondary education in both developed and developing regions. This encompasses the least developed nations, small island developing states, and African countries. Available courses include those in scientific, engineering, and technological fields; computer and communications technologies; and career development.

Meaning : To enhance the capabilities of developing countries, it is essential to establish scholarship programs from affluent nations for students in less developed countries. Donor countries are encouraged to provide additional forms of educational financial support, while recognizing the significance of scholarships. In line with the emphasis on equity, inclusion, and quality under S.D.G. 4-Education 2030, scholarships should primarily focus on youth from underprivileged backgrounds.

3. **Teachers and academicians**

What it suggests: Every target of SDG4 relies on the presence of teachers. Immediate action is required because the disparity in the number of professionally trained educators, especially in disadvantaged areas, worsens the gap in educational equity. As crucial players in providing students with a quality education, teachers ought to have a degree of autonomy, receive fair compensation, be encouraged, be well-qualified, and be supported within well-equipped and effectively managed systems.

E. **SOURCE OF DATA**: Our study is based on secondary data.

F. **FINDINGS**

1. The transition to high-quality education was already progressing more slowly than needed before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has significantly worsened the situation, leading to learning losses in four of the five examined countries.

2. If no further action is taken, only one out of six countries will meet the target for universal secondary school completion by 2030. Furthermore, approximately 300 million students will lack the essential reading and math skills required for success in life, and 84 million children and adolescents will remain out of school.

3. Even though the initial standards for Goal 4 were less ambitious, 79 nations classified as low- and lower-middle-income still need to address an average annual funding gap of $97 billion to fulfill the national Goal 4 requirements.

4. To realize Goal 4, it is crucial to establish national priorities for education funding. Essential policies include providing free education, increasing the number of employed teachers, enhancing school infrastructure, and embracing digital transformation.

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