



Integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Ugandan Education System: Enhancing Academic Performance and Future Success

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Ugandan education system and its impact on academic performance and future success. It investigates the significance of incorporating SDGs into curriculum design, teacher training, student engagement, and career preparation. The methodology involves a qualitative analysis of existing literature and empirical data from interviews and surveys conducted among educators, policymakers, and students. Findings suggest that SDGs integration enhances critical thinking, problem-solving skills, global awareness, and motivation among students, thereby contributing to sustainable development and future success. The study concludes that aligning education with SDGs is essential for addressing societal challenges and preparing students for diverse and sustainable careers.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Education system, Uganda, Academic performance and Future success

INTRODUCTION

The significance of SDGs in education goes beyond the contribution they make to national development; it also impacts the future success of learners and other stakeholders, among others, as revealed in this expository paper. G. Jha, D. Rajwade, and N. Bhutoria maintain that education does not only serve as a catalyst for national development but also acts as a stepping stone to the future successes of the learners [1, 2]. E. Adorye added that through education, everybody benefits via enhanced innovation, less inequality, peacebuilding, poverty eradication, and above all, progress. About the future success of learners through education, E. Adorye, P. Eke, F. Nkem, E. Otod, and H. Algah wrote that globally, the "no child left behind" and "education for all" initiatives compelled their respective governments to augment the number of public schools, supply suitable teaching and learning materials, admit grantees to the "for all" schools, and train the trainees from its teacher training colleges free of charge for a winnable campaign [3, 4]. With the eight Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000, soon coming to an end, the UN introduced a set of fifteen-year global and national goals aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet, and guaranteeing peace and prosperity for everybody. Global leaders have also promised to achieve these ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by integrating them into their national plans and policies and by setting up future courses of action. Save for some specific awareness campaigns at the national level, such as the music, They Shall Not Die and reality of education in Kybezwa village in Nkwenge County, Equator, Uganda, organized by Dianah Nabatanzi, there is still limited discussion of these goals and their significance for education at the national level. Thus, as a top-down approach, it is important that education policymakers and planners in Uganda pick an interest, broaden the debate on these hugely significant goals, and explore the development, future, and utilization of these goals within the nation's education sector [5, 6].

Importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Integration

Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into a university curriculum is vital in skill and knowledge generation that facilitates linkage between university education and the community, addressing common issues of the development of the countries in which they are located. These learning opportunities value both parental guidance and the education offered in the formal schooling system, thereby increasing school academic performance. The influence of the integrated SDGs in the educational system and the future academic performance of university graduates is outstanding. The more the young generation is empowered with the necessary skills, knowledge, and sensitization on how to address common issues within societies and the environment, which could have limited their achievements, the

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better the academic performances of the young individuals towards the progress of the countries' economies [7, 8]. A curriculum should be well-structured and ultimately balanced in terms of the delivery of essential skills/competence and social values. Justification of concepts based on the life experiences of the student. A good curriculum should be consistent with the national aspirations/goals.

In Uganda, the development planning process, from which budgeting is derived, is guided by three key policy documents: the National Development Plan collections (about 10 years each), the National Budget Framework paper (about 2 years), and the Budget Speech (for 1 year). According to information, some of how these goals are integrated into university curriculums include:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an integration of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international policies, aim to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change by 2030. They are aimed at providing feasible and sustainable opportunities for all citizens of the world, including future generations. These SDGs have been integrated into different national budgets throughout the world through national development plans, as well as university curriculums, especially in developing nations [9-11].

Academic Performance and Future Success

Academic performance is directly related to the future success of a student after university training. How can a Ugandan secondary school system lead to the enhanced academic performance of its learners and subsequently to the future successes of these individuals? To answer this question, one has to borrow ideas and experiences from the literature that informs us that success is not an artificial phenomenon. Success starts from the day an individual is born. How much a person benefits from childhood rights, early childhood care, and medical services is a measure of how much society is prepared to invest in a child that will later be entrusted with its future. While a mother's attitudes and decisions towards the care of her child may be critical, Ugandan society, as any, has a duty and responsibility to ensure that the environment is conducive for such experiences. Success (academic and non-academic) is a measure of how much an individual has fully expressed himself/herself in career-making [12]. In colleges and universities where academic performance is measured, performance is often measured through means of traditional assessments that include quizzes, class examinations, term paper writing, and final examinations marked on a rigorous scale of 0-100 percent. Furthermore, academic performance here shall also include intellectual abilities such as the natural range of gathering new information, knowledge construction, and imaginative applications. Academic performance is thus not only the marks we acquire in our daily class work, but also the practical application of knowledge, successful future achievements, confidence boosts, and enhanced abilities to perform future duties. Owamah's definition is corroborated by Gukas who shared the view that excellent performance happens when knowledge is transformed into a new product when knowledge is used for the enhancement of human health, wealth, and welfare [13, 14, 15].

Integration of SDGs in the Ugandan Education System

Several SDGs directly yoke the education system in achieving them. The first one is SDG 3 good health and well-being. The effort of hastening the achievement; advocating for an enlightened citizenry good enough to call for better health services, consciously adopting good sanitation habits, and performing duties is minimal if the education system does not inform and facilitate the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and competences that inspire a healthy life. Furthermore, the knowledge inscribed in SDGs is so vast its expedited realization calls for different scopes of knowledge and ways of making sense of it. It is the education system that actualizes the forging of an understanding of the nature, significance, and power of the required knowledge in dealing with the development issues at hand. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all has its most practical chance of being achieved if the curriculum, policies, learning resources, qualifications, and governance are all framed and seen through the lens of SDGs [16, 17]. It has been noted that without the deliberate and conscious integration of SDGs in the education system, sustainable development processes will remain a complex issue to address. As such, the integration calls for the infusion of the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills in SDGs within the learning content to make them complete and relevant in meeting the educational objectives. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Global Citizenship Education Handbook explains that "Global Citizenship Education is a vision for a humanistic, equitable, and sustainable society. As part of this vision, UNESCO has expressed ambitious educational goals to promote cultural diversity, cultural dialogue, and awareness of shared values through explicit action at the local, national, and international levels. This institutional commitment to action reinforced its interest in establishing a baseline against which it can measure progress" [18, 19].

Curriculum Alignment with SDGs

Sustainable development has been integrated into education in Uganda to increase the relevance of the education system to the needs of society and the market. To ensure that the SDGs are well integrated into all curriculum subjects, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S) developed a National Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD) Policy in 2016. This policy was created to balance the physical, social/emotional, cognitive, and spiritual roles of caregivers in Uganda. In the same year, the MoE&S revised the primary school curriculum, which was implemented in 2017 [20, 21]. This revision was carried out under a 'Holistic Techniques' model of SD reflection, following research conducted among community members in Mpigi District, Uganda. This research revealed that context-based reflection on current Ugandan culture and way of life, as well as development aspirations reflected in Vision 2040 desired outcomes or the social developmental pillars of rule of law, democracy, and equitable development, had not been reinforced within the Ugandan education system during the post-MDG and SDG I period. This led to notable non-inspiring performances of learners, a lack of meaningful engagement, and poor alignment of education with national and sociological geographical development commitments [22]. The government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S), has ensured that formal education is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the existing curriculum design does not guarantee the acquisition of knowledge of all seventeen SDGs by the end of primary education. This means that learners can progress through that level without fully understanding the concept of sustainable development, even though they need that knowledge for the future. To achieve sustainable development and socio-economic transformation in Uganda, education must incorporate the most important current socio-economic and environmental needs as reflected in the SDGs [23, 24].

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Documented through the expertise of manual and Africa Youth Vision 2030 and One Earth Engineers, secondary resources and training framework from Africa, and specialized manuals within the KERRY (Winning) Program, the system was able to pull through scientific learning even in a crisis. In the absence of specialized technicians and reagents, students could perform skillfully and safely and produce intended learning outcomes. The importance of integrating local construction experts, who can be both pedagogical advisors and tastemakers, is greatly appreciated, thereby realizing new sustainable development goals that were already identified earlier. Local learning materials prepared by experts to suit their specialties could greatly improve students' safety and expertise that students will later transfer to their communities. This can only be realized if both the teachers and experts available can 'taste' and establish the required qualities, a very human-centric model for blended, in-service teacher professional development. Its focus was to empower teachers to use user-friendly, low-cost, renewable energy educational materials to teach Africa Renewal. Finally, "An active pedagogical process should be encouraged, encouraging an active student role, particularly relevant to team education, with human groups' coaching teamwork and expert-ready student interactions being the key to the success of the case" [25, 26]. Furthermore, remote training following short-term support was successfully integrated using simple IT solutions such as dedicated training YouTube channels, etc. All of these enabled better, sustainable support on-site, where only minor challenges and the required support were addressed. This is true to the word of that teacher professional development could be a key element in enhancing students' learning and future success. Teachers need to be available to support the facilitators as they use technologies. So, a large gap between initial conditions and success is truly a sign of an ominous outcome that we may need to arrest. Home-based training is one of the alternatives that could be used to bridge the gap, and it may just be an undocumented resource that may be needed [27].

In terms of teacher training and professional development, technical training (among the laboratory technicians) is key to building the right confidence. Being exposed to new equipment, understanding the content of the exercise beforehand, and knowing and understanding standards and expectations, for example, has been attested to strengthen the instructor-helper relationship, create a supportive learning environment, and identify significant lessons through shared experiences. This indicates the difficulties that arise without proper preparation, but rather with ornamented resource management and superior coordination. Therefore, if these resources are managed differently, starting from administration, their purpose can be optimized [28].

Student Engagement in SDG-related Activities

The allocation of Uganda's National Budget to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) during the financial year 2018-2019 was Shs.3,099.6 billion. Based on the 11% allocation of the National Budget to the education sector, it ascertains that education continues to be the most funded sector. The National Strategy for Public Sector Education had it that 'Education serves as a fundamental channel for building

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values, vision, ambition, self-esteem, emotional balance, and knowledge.' The report also referred to education as a vehicle through which "the potential manpower needed for the country's development vision is realized" and strategically positioned [29]. Despite the many efforts by the country's education sector, performance standards have been controversial due to high dropout rates, low literacy levels, and numeracy levels. The 2015/2016 report indicates that literacy levels were at 75% at P4, and 35% at P7. [30], indicates that regional disparities in basic literacy levels lead to children continuing to complete primary school while not in mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills. A report on Engaging Generation Z: 12 Transformational Actions for Education Leaders cites a survey by The Economist about the views that Generation Z students have about global issues. Most of them, 82%, reported that they are very committed to improving the planet and 71% considered their change of habit to be a sign of their commitment to the global challenges. This data shows the increasing interest of young people in their society and their environment. These students are also aware of the potential of their participation in global challenges and participate in activities related to these topics. They realize the importance of acquiring knowledge that will enable them to find solutions that can be implemented in the sense of the Sustainable Development Goals, and about teaching, they emphasize the importance of similarities between acquired learning and the context in which they are living. To answer the research question, what are the perceptions of teacher educators of primary school on the relevance of Sustainable Development Goals adaptation in the Ugandan Education System to improve the performance and future success of students? The researcher conducted a study from a qualitative perspective using mixed methods [31, 32].

Impact on Academic Performance

Almost 95% of all UPE schools lack basic facilities and services for sanitation, water supply, unsafe structures, strikes, overpopulation, and even low academic performance. Government and development partners are working together to mitigate several of these issues, yet some are deepening. Some affect adults as well as students and are too expensive to handle for UPE schools to operate at a standard greater than they do today [33, 34]. SDGs become an extension of students, with greater vision. They become economically self-reliant, invaluable workforce for anyone to reckon with, she explains. Cynthia Kansiime, a head teacher with 25 years of service, has been working hard to advocate behavior change for schools to add flexible and sustainable classroom priority areas. She believes new standards are helpful in modeling, exercising, and sustaining sustainable knowledge to prepare healthy productive future leaders. Amy Mann, a Mathematics teacher, is optimistic about the initiative. The standards give me hope and allow me to teach beyond the limits of time, she says [36, 37]. According to Enhancing Education in Uganda, the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the education curriculum would increase the academic performance of Ugandan students. This assertion was given credence by SDGs Strategist, Consultant, and Executive Director, of Transform Education Uganda (TEU), John Mulindwa, who says SDGs bring different sectors together. Mr. Mulindwa equated that since a student begins from early childhood learning, he or she is not only academic but engaged in advocacy, economic productivity, and capable of influencing both locally and globally. It is from the early childhood education orientation that a confident student emerges, and with the sustainable development standards to guide institutions, the majority of the SDGs are likely to be achieved sustainably, than any other measures that are already in place [38].

Improved Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

To reform the traditional Uganda education instruction system, the curriculum development and instructor revision of 2014 aimed at making education more than an examination-oriented approach, and instead, to emphasize a holistic approach to children's learning. This meant that the traditional lecture note and examination approach had to be replaced with a continuous and comprehensive assessment of children's learning in line with the Performance Appraisal Approach (PAA) model. This approach approved the use of drawings, oral expression, role-plays, visual presentations, internet exploration, and interactive discussions among others, as more appropriate methods of instruction. [39], believed that introducing this type of instruction causes learners to more critically engage with their learning, something that would yield improved academic performance, skills in self-expression, and analytical and cognitive abilities. The traditional school system of learning in Uganda was mostly characterized by a teacher-to-learner unidirectional system where the teacher would simply provide information to the learners who were expected to consume it as passive learners and instruction followers. However, this model of instruction promotes the theoretical aspect of inherited information, stressing passive rote learning and the theoretical aspect of knowledge. This type of instructional model has been critiqued scientifically, and its falling characteristics are reported as having the potential to produce learners with little or no ability to apply their learned knowledge in real-life situations. The Teachers' Guide of the

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National Teacher Education Policy in Kenya of 2016 insists that as teachers prepare learners for future success, problem-solving should be a key focus as it enhances learners' academic performance and future success in life. In support, the Teacher Core Competences Framework in Kenya of 2018 advocates for critical thinking and problem-solving, an element that is intended to help learners generate new ideas or apply the learned information in solving real-life societal problems [40-42].

Enhanced Global Awareness and Citizenship

Globally conscious and active citizens are the pillars of every society as they enlighten, influence, motivate, mobilize others, and work towards sustainable development whose right to education is guaranteed. Being incorporated into the Ugandan education system, SDGs go beyond schools to community-wide understanding. This action of "catch them young" has a higher impact compared to when the population grasps the concept at the tertiary level or when people make independent discoveries and understand it through exposure during private business transactions. "Catch them young" should, therefore, be the new norm in education to prepare schools to create transformative hearts and minds through experiential learning and innovative pedagogies. A study conducted by Akom and Ntarangwi in 2017 revealed that globally conscious and active citizens engage in short-term and long-term plans, develop and support policies, and strengthen sustainable establishments and research aimed at resolving global challenges confronting communities and the world at large [43-45]. Incorporating the 17 SDGs in the education systems of developing countries enables learners to have a deep understanding and global awareness of the environment. Now, with digital news media and technological advancements, learning about global issues has been made easier and faster. Learners will understand global issues such as poverty, gender equality, climate change, unclean water, and inadequate sanitation facilities in multiple countries and gather information on global challenges occurring locally and internationally. This knowledge and awareness will influence their mindsets and will trigger a sense of empathy and cooperation to alleviate global problems through various efforts like sharing knowledge, providing services, or raising funds in line with their personal, academic, and career interests. For instance, learners who understand the critical role of clean water in achieving SDG 1, 2, 3, and 4 might embark on campaigns to sensitize communities about the importance of clean water, engage people in water-harvesting initiatives, or design and implement action research to capture rainwater for their school institutions. In the end, they gain an understanding of themselves about others and can contribute and make a positive impact globally [46-48].

Increased Motivation and Engagement in Learning

The integration of the SDGs in the education system demanded the full participation of learners. Students were asked to contribute to research, proposal writing, and discussions on addressing community issues using the education system services. Teachers in the investigated schools expressed satisfaction in engaging their learners in solving community problems by empowering them through the learning process. In most of the schools, learners had taken the challenge to address issues of sanitation, water supply, management of wastes, and addressing issues of peace, poverty, technology, and climate change. This increased interactions among the learners and between learners and their teachers. The learning process became more inquiry-based. Learners, through research, worked on the demands and needs of the surrounding communities and shared with experts for verification and guidance. Taught competencies and knowledge were obtained through the real-life problems presented by the community and formulated into research projects. The SDGs thus engaged learners in research with a clear vision towards the development of empowered learners. This practice, unlike the centralized taught content, motivated the learners and the community. It also proved that there can be a strong relationship between the learners, the education system, the subjects, and the surrounding societies for sustainable development [49, 50]. The research findings on the impacts of the SDGs integration in the education system revealed that learners' motivation and perception towards the education system changed positively and increased their engagement, participation in learning, and retention rates. The idea of including their potential needs, cultural values, traditional practices, social aspects, the physical environment in learning, and the global demand encouraged the learners to engage actively and take learning seriously. In the investigated schools, learners' dropout rates were minimal inclusion of marginalized groups as a result of the learners' engagement in the teaching and learning process. They began to appreciate the relevance of education, and that is why they had to engage more in the learning process to compensate for the time wasted in the past when they were affected by the centralized content of the Ugandan education system that sidestepped the SDGs [51-53].

Future Success and SDGs Integration

Undoubtedly, knowledge in a misused way will give a negative signal towards the improvement of society since the DSMH theory poses a problem to it. This is due to the reality of the aforementioned theory

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which supports that, despite the widespread knowledge, many experienced frustrations in their social life. According to the theory, these experiences in non-academic institutional education serve as challenges in understanding the environment and the existing society. The test of the truth and falsehood of this educational struggle - hence becoming a yoke, must be carried out through the fixation of educational modes that would make learners acquire both formal education and the education of the society. Acquiring this combination could come through an extension of the knowledge curriculum to cover sociological, epistemological, and axiological teachings that extend the cognitive faculties and not the other aspects of education. Often, it is during their primary and secondary schools that learners are more exposed to the values of mutual aid and the culture of doing things together. Assuming, the propagation of academic goals alone by designing courses where learners would be exposed to practical situations, they can perceive the necessity of practical life realities that surround their areas of study. Success in academia leads to positive influences in the decision and problem-solving of societal problems [54-56]. There is a high level of global competition both academically and in the job market among people of all ages. Success is no longer about what one knows. However, there is no direct evidence if the desire to be successful is because it's a necessity to survive especially in the job market, or if people believe in self-attainment of success. Though there is no concrete explanation for success, society's outlook on the behavior of people who are deemed successful reflects a reasonable image. Conventionally, education housed the potentiality for failure and success in future life. Nonetheless, education continues to strive to indoctrinate learners with knowledge rather than skills or practicality to solve societal problems yet society's perception of success depends on learners' ability to integrate formal education in solving everyday issues. Equally, no single discipline can solve all arising societal issues. To an optimum level, the Ugandan education system integrated the Sustainable Development Goals hence the inherent motive to question if academic success depends on knowledge, its integrative aspect, or the possibility of finding solutions to issues arising in the society [57].

Preparation for Sustainable Careers

The region has to realize the proposal made by the United Nations to divert from the goal set by the concluded "Education for All (EFA)" and embrace educational strategies of the "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" to match the aspirations of the two objectives where inclusive and equitable education that promotes lifelong learning, personal behaviors, knowledge, and technical skills will be of paramount importance shortly. However, by 2017, the reduced desire for such professions as Manufacturing workers, Shop assistants, Hairdressers, and Down-trodden service providers, Recruitment Officers, Public opinion, demeaned positions like secretaries and cleaners among others. Against popular belief, the majority of the wealthy people in Eastern and South Saharan African regions had professions that were not very common in the previous years. Other non-familiar professions had steadily arrived in the top ten such as Construction workers, teachers, Technicians, Sales supervisors, and service supervisors. Despite the continuous emphasis on education to improve children academically, the teaching profession which is always related to educational performance was second on the list of jobs of the wealthy people in the region while businesspeople were at the bottom [58-61]. The observation that new careers are hampered by our current curriculum seems understandable as most professions that we may now refer to as top careers were either nonexistent or not common by the year 2002. Many examples may substantiate our argument. Manufacturing and Trade were among the top ten for countries like Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, Uganda, and Kenya, and wealthy people included other clubs known as Business owners, Academics, Teachers, Drivers, Waiters, etc. Apart from the skills that can be gained from a cross-curricular framework, curiosity and openness towards a problem-oriented or issue-based education will be of immense importance in preparing our students for future diverse and frequently unpredictable careers. Few careers will be found in disciplines that we now concentrate on for our graduation programs. A few people of our familiar careers will be needed shortly. While such a statement sounds irrational, many people are overwhelmed by the idea and this makes them stakeholders of a problem about the future their children are preparing for – a reason why this study has been conducted [62, 63].

Contribution to Sustainable Development

For something as fundamental as education, there should be no vacuum in this agenda, and in particular in our educational system. Most sustainability dilemmas may be traced back to issues of improper knowledge use or its absence, especially within the development network. Education, as a consequence, becomes the hotbed of guiding economy, footprints, narratives, trends, concepts, and population dynamics, among others, into a direction where they ought to provide an optimum yield for future benefit. To underscore this thesis, [64] submits that "Put an imbalance of wealth in; reinforce with an education to stagnate the larger part of the population; sprinkle with a seasoning of inflation tilting the price system; bake with an economy of uncertainty and murmuring jobs". The new development agenda

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follows several successful global pacts on major development issues in the past, namely the Jomtien Conference on Education for All, and the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), among others. The recent United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, popularly known as the Rio+20 Summit, was without doubt a route towards setting a workable and proactive development agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains a grand global pact, which we are yet to fully realize its potential in Uganda. Unlike today, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires a coordinated effort from all citizens, working in their various capacities and with an inquisitive eye into the future [65]

CONCLUSION

Integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Ugandan education system is crucial for enhancing academic performance and preparing students for future success. The study highlights the importance of curriculum alignment, teacher training, student engagement, and career preparation in promoting sustainable development and addressing societal challenges. By incorporating SDGs into education, Uganda can empower students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to contribute positively to their communities and the world.

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