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Editorial

Sustainable Education and Sustainability in Education: The Reality in the Era of Internationalisation and Commodification in Education—Is Higher Education Different?

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1. Introduction

Sustainable education refers to knowledge delivery that ensures a balanced national development which encompasses both economic and social development as well as a human needs perspective [1]. In the era of globalisation, international education, particularly education in the West, dominates the globe, which subsequently contributes to international development by developing a "dependency theory" for the East to follow [2]. Hence, national development remains a by-product, while international development is always the central focus to which education primarily contributes [3]. Under such a climate, sustainable education for an emerging nation is merely a theory that stays far from the reality [4].

While local education is unable to compete in the era of globalisation, local elites often skim the cream off the top in education [1–3]. Hence, education has become one of the powerful tools that the elites can use to deprive underprivileged groups by introducing a "free market-driven theory" in education. This market-driven theory facilitates the development of a specialized, differentiated, and elite education program for the privileged group to widen the gap between the elite and poor, as the need for standardised or unified education is often denied by the policymakers and legislators in the emerging nations [4]. Poor people in emerging nations are often required to put in significant effort from an adverse and uneven condition to even access a free education locally available [5]. Hence, free education is also referred to as public education, which is the only shelter for the poor people and is becoming less effective over time. Under these circumstances, whether sustainable education in the era of internationalisation and commodification is a reality or an international political marvel is a question that needs to be addressed in the near future.

Sustainability in education either refers to those education programs that are capable of protecting the environment and ensuring the cautious usage of natural resources, or to the settings of educational institutes and their research arrangements with the alignment of the protection of the environment and natural resources [6]. In general, scientific-ism and modernisation are often blamed for damaging the genesis of the sustainability of nature, which will cause a grave adverse impact in the long run [6].

Institutions of education have expanded dramatically over the last two decades [5,6]. Hence, they are forced to adopt a market-responsive theory in order to survive in the era of modernisation and commodification [6]. The adoption of a market-responsive theory would surely halt the institutions of education to retain within the genesis of education philosophy. Consequently, sustainability in education might be another "lollipop" to keep the education system busy developing a big market for business without making a meaningful impact—a discourse which is yet to be explored.

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2. Undeniable Fact: Internationalisation and Commodification in Education

The tuition fees of a student studying in an international school in many parts of the globe (such as China, Malaysia, Korea, Hong Kong, UAE) are almost the same as a professor's salary in those countries [3]. The position of professor in an academic atmosphere. In order to reach a professorial stage, one not only has to show an exemplary success in his/her student life but also must display an illuminating performance in their academic career. Hence, a number of questions are generated: whom are the students studying in these schools? What are the aims and ambitions of these children after completion of their studentship career? How much money are these children are going to make after their education, and how will they make it? Would these children consider education as a philosophical program required for sustainable national development, or do they believe education is a commodity that they can use as a weapon to "kill" others for their own personal gain [1–3].

Moreover, the underprivileged students who cannot receive such an education might be inclined to take revenge if the scope arises [3]. In such a case, if someone from an underprivileged community became educated and reached an elite position in public service by overcoming inexplicable pains, might they be extremely corrupted to earn money to ensure the future of the children [1]. Hence, the following questions are generated: is this internationalisation and commodification in education an ally or enemy for sustainable national development? Should we label this as sustainable education even if it may bring a very specialised prospect for the elites?

Having said that, we may also need to note one of the important connotations—such international education delivered in China, Malaysia, UAE, and Korea is a national product of either USA, UK or Australia. Children in the USA, UK and Australia procure this education program as part of their national education program, which is free of cost. While this kind of education is very expensive in one part of the globe, the other supplies this free of cost. This may suggest that local education in the former countries may experience a huge "educational inflation" compared to the latter, thus leading to very high demand for international education within the local community of the former [2,3].

The above discussion might raise a graver concern regarding sustainable education, which subsequently has an implication for the sustainability in education. Under this climate, poor students would go to public schools that offer free education and that lack decent governance and regulatory control mechanism. Such a lack of governance and regulatory control not only interrupt the delivery of substantial education but also contribute to the misuse of resources such as water, electricity and land, which can be considered as a threat to sustainability in education [7,8].

This may add unnecessary expenses in education from the public exchequer. On the other hand, private schools might adopt a luxury theory in education which may ensure greater use of supplementary and complementary items in education (such as a swimming pool, theatre, amusement park, etc.) by squeezing the fundamental elements needed for sustainable education. This approach may help them to sell the education at a far higher cost compared to the production cost. However, this neither supports sustainable education nor ensures sustainability in education. The above discussions have highlighted the generic facts, so let us now focus on the issue of internationalisation and commodification in particular, with reference to higher education.

Internationalisation and Commodification in Higher Education

The generic effect of internationalisation and commodification exclusively helps the elites of emerging nations to access specialised/differentiated higher education for private interests and benefits by exploiting public gains. Ideally, higher education should shape the primary and secondary provisions as sustainable providers through its research and innovation—a common tenet suggests that it is not the elite-driven but merit-driven higher education system that support the concept of sustainable development in education. Hav-

ing said that, higher education provision predominantly experiences a number of graver concerns in connection to internationalisation and commodification.

Firstly, most of the universities in developing countries are yet to be hubs for research, innovation and knowledge discovery. Hence, they are reliant on the knowledge discovery made in their Western counterparts; subsequently, the courses curricula, expertise and delivery methods used in these Eastern universities are borrowed from their Western counterparts. This borrowing model, which is commonly known as internationalisation in higher education, has become entirely one-way traffic and trade, forcing higher education in emerging nations to assume the role of agent that serves the interests of the principal counterpart. Hence, whereas a university in the East supports local development in its function as an agent, its main role is to ensure the benefits of the West to a greater extent. Hence, studying in a local university does not necessarily mean that it will ensure exclusive local benefits. Consequently, internationalisation in higher education following one-way traffic may not result in a sustainable education system.

Secondly, the Sino–foreign cooperative model in higher education is well-evidently expanding with the prevailing local and international policy support. This international cooperation in higher education also suggests that the export and trade barrier in higher education is only removed for Western counterparts, as the higher education in the Eastern part of the globe has failed to take advantage of the GATS (General Agreement of Trade and Services) verdict that allows higher education as an international commodity.

Thirdly, a significant portion of students from developing nations often travels to the West to further their study, which may incur a direct loss of foreign currency. However, a decent lifestyle in the West, talent-based migration and social policy, and a true essence of internationalisation support the "push and pull theory", which motivates the talent to migrate to the West and to serve the interests of the destined location at the cost of his earned education by using the funds of the origin country. The portion of students who may return to their origin country after education may also serve as an agent of international development. Hence, internationalisation and commodification in higher education deserves much more attention in the era of sustainable education or sustainability in education.

3. A New Glimpse for Sustainable and Sustainability in Education

A significant number of specialised and differentiated studies has been conducted covering a wider spectrum in education (such as curriculum and instructional technology, teacher education, technology and innovation in education, school settings, education policy, best practice in education, international education and development, educational segmentation) to enrich the discourse of sustainable education and sustainability in education since their inception. All of these studies [7–11] claimed that the respective models are substantially helpful for sustainable education and sustainability in education. It is therefore acceptable to consider that these models have offered significant help to the development of education.

Despite these claims, education generally helps developed countries to rule over their developing counterparts, while on the other hand, the elites in developing countries skim the cream off the top in the era of internationalisation and commodification in education—this is an undeniable fact that receives less attention in the discourse of sustainable education [2,3,7]. The proposition that follows does not fundamentally propose a comprehensive solution for the problem raised; rather, it provides a glimpse so that future studies in this area can cover them broadly to present an extensive resolution.

Firstly, we propose that the standardisation of national education programs is the foremost need that the country has to plan. This standardisation should be determined in the alignment of a nation's economic and social developmental goals as well as a human needs perspective. Standardised education should be very competitive to challenge the international benchmark. Furthermore, standardised education must be homogeneous and unified to all students. Students' merits are the sole parameter for the selection of

education, not their socioeconomic status. All institutes of education are obliged to follow the concept of standardised education.

Secondly, the production cost of standardised education should be determined by scientifically calculating for each program, level, and type; subsequently, a selling price will be dogged by ensuring a minimum profit so that the educational institute is able to survive. The production cost of education should not be driven by the budget but should be determined by the standard of education targeted by the nation.

The budget for standardised education is to be ensured following the production cost that is determined by scientific calculation. All entities (public, private) of education should follow this principle regardless of the demands made by their customers. An increased or an artificial demand for education and, subsequently, an amplified but unproductive budget (both formal and informal) to meet such demand inevitably create a huge inflation for both investment in education and the qualifications provided.

Thirdly, the free school concept needs to be remodified and re-defined. Currently, the concept of free and paid education is determined by the entity/type of school (such as private, public, semi-public). Following this concept, an educational institute is no longer a common place for all children regardless of their SES; rather, a particular entity is designated for a specific economic cluster of children.

The free school concept should be re-defined, whereby education will be free for the "needy" based on their needs. Education expenses include both direct and indirect costs. Moreover, some ultra-poor groups (especially those who are bound to be the child labour needed to survive) need additional support to continue their education, which should be labelled as 100% + free education. Some students might not need additional support but do need the support for both direct and indirect costs, which is to be called 100% free. Hence, both 100% +/− free concept and 100% +/− paid concept are to be introduced and reinforced.

This concept will not be implemented by the school entity but by the SES of the students. Here, the government subsidy will be provided to the children according to the SES through a voucher-based system or any other considerable method(s) based on further research. The students would be able to use this voucher regardless of their school entity. The financially able students need to pay regardless of the type/entity of school that they may attend. This is how a substantial investment model based on a particular nation's educational needs is to be incorporated for the collective and public interest.

Fourthly, both the public and private return from education needs to be re-mechanised. Upon employment of graduates, a differentiated and specialised taxation mechanism should be in place so that the government can cover the subsidy that has already been used for a particular group's education. Hence, two graduates (i.e., one graduate with a subsidy and one without) having the same kind of qualification and same level of income range should pay differentiated tax so that the underprivileged students (who enjoy 100% +/− free education) do not have much leverage to consider that the subsidy is granted forever. While the above agenda is generally applicable for the education system as a whole, the next paragraph spotlights a specialised item for higher education.

In order to improve the efficacy of higher education, an industry-driven system is acutely needed as higher education supplies its graduates to the industry. Meaningful industry participation for both curriculum development process and delivery as well as assessment of higher education needs to be ensured. A substantial and scientifically well regulated industry levy system may ensure significant industry participation in higher education. Students should not just enjoy a scope of pre-paid tuition fees but may be able to use a post-paid fees mechanism where the university would collect the fees directly from the employing industry on behalf of its employed graduates. This approach would oblige both demand and supply sides to invest a collaborative effort in order to ensure a sustainable higher education which is capable of contributing to both public and private benefits.

This approach would force them not to be lethargic in the competition of education. On the other hand, introducing a 100% +/− fees model for financially able students will de-

motivate them (i.e., those students who are less academically capable) and not to disbalance the education system, since this revised education system would allow the financially poor but academically able students to defeat the less academically capable students in the entire journey of education. If both the investments in education and returns from education are not regulated as public goods and in the interest of the public, sustainable education would remain a nightmare for the emerging nation and exist only in theory. In the absence of sustainable education, resources in education should typically experience huge wastage or misuse and would thereby contribute to educational inflation. Consequently, sustainable education serves as the prerequisite for sustainability in education.

4. Thematic Highlights from the SI's Papers: Concluding Remark

Before summarising the substance of this SI, let us highlight some collective themes from the different clusters of the published papers. Of the published papers, five [9,11–13] have explored academic and teacher education perspectives. Each paper develops its rationale by accepting that academic excellence is not up to the mark in emerging nations. In solving such a crisis, Refs. [9,11] suggested that academics should abide by the philosophy of education, particularly higher education, while [12,13] advocated in favour of the adaptation of technology in teaching and learning affairs and the provision of policy preference for such interventions.

Five papers [8,14–16] have explored the issue of sustainable innovation in higher education. One of the common issues faced in rationalising the study, as each paper has acknowledged, is that a significant space for innovation has remained vacated. In offering a resolution, refs. [8,14] have argued that the institutes of higher education have to be the role model in implementing sustainable innovation before they are able to transmit this into their own society, while [14,15] advocated that sustainable innovation is a collective effort that must be driven by all of the stakeholders involved.

Five papers [7,10,14,17,18] have explored the role of public and private provisions in delivering sustainable higher education by comparing the strength and weaknesses of each counterpart. One of the common propositions suggests that public system misuses the budgets via different forms of corruption, while their private counterparts squeeze the resources for profits. A scientific model to resolve such problems for private counterparts is suggested by [7], while [10,14,17,18] advocated that both public and private provisions must understand the reality that higher education experiences in the 21st century without compromising the philosophy of higher education. Having said that, each paper, regardless of its context, argued that universities in emerging nations are lagging behind in the international ranking league table of sustainable higher education, and the prescription provided in the study would support the push to improve the position of these universities in the international competition league.

The successful submissions in this Special Issue have not just covered a narrow field in the area of sustainable education and sustainability in education. Rather, the publications have covered various angles and aspects related to the theme. These publications suggest that innovation and technology are not sufficient to combat the challenges involved in sustainable education and sustainability in education unless the root causes are identified and preventative measures are subsequently taken. We also realised that although sustainability in education and sustainable education are two different concepts, the distinction between them is not often acknowledged.

A misleading distinction, without identifying the root causes, is also occasionally made to define and to demarcate sustainable education and sustainability in education. Moreover, research is lacking in the discovery of the connecting point between sustainable education and sustainability in education. Hence, to have focused attention, a new Special Issue entitled "Sustainable Education and Sustainability in Education: Policy and Implementation Direction in the Era of SDGs" is developed under the section of "Sustainable Education and Approaches" in *Sustainability*, where new submissions are welcomed.

5. Further Readings

1. Special Issue "Sustainable Education and Sustainability in Education: Policy and Implementation Direction in the Era of SDGs". Available online: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability/special_issues/Q462Y110A0 (accessed on 25 December 2022).
2. Special Issue "Approach and Policy in Higher Education for Sustainability". Available online: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability/special_issues/Higher_Education_Sustainability (accessed on 25 December 2022).

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Short Biography of Author

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