

Campus Sustainability Discourse of Universities – A Critical Review

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Abstract

The concept of sustainability has not been established enough to gain the status of a scientific model and worldwide acceptance as a unified signifier with the same semantics. Institutions, especially higher education institutions, have been redefining it to achieve their goals. A democratic ecological and social order is the main connotation of all the definitions. There is a risk of becoming merely a new term devoid of substantive meaning in the discourse of sustainable development. This article aims to explore the diverse connotations it holds via various studies to illustrate the mammoth significance it embraces. There is a lack of specific criteria and incisive discussions within the higher education institutions seeking sustainability in Pakistan. This research article circumspectly examines the fundamental role in both developed and developing countries such as Pakistan through the qualitative method of narrative review of previously written articles, book chapters, web links and conference papers. After the discussion and critique, certain gaps were identified and suggestions are given to foster a clear discourse of campus sustainability in general as well as in the context of Pakistan.

Keywords

Higher education campuses; sustainability concepts; discourse; sustainable development; Pakistan

Introduction

Defining “sustainability”

The uncompromised ability to meet the present needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs (Brundtland, 1987) is the most popular and widely followed definition to date, having the “cradle to grave” approach to sustainability (Butler, Henderson & Raiborn, 2011). After that, various definitions sprung up, but they did not problematize the concept of sustainability discourse since the three dimensions have been agreed upon by almost every school of thought related to “the economic, environmental, and social responsibility” (Lopez & Martin, 2018, p. 1). This agreement clearly shows that the three most significant dimensions of human ecology, i.e., social, physical and financial are considered in most definitions.

Starting from the very simple definition of balancing these basic dimensions that lead to the “well-being” of any ecology, it connotes the discourse of “future development and life quality” (McKeown, 2002, p. 8). Though it is widely used across scientific fields, particularly in environmental sciences, the concept’s evolution remains complex (Leal Filho, 2000) while dealing with misconceptions related to sustainability. This complexity may stem from its abstract nature, lack of ownership or clear agency, too vast scope, lack of profitability, or perceived lack of scientific rigor (Leal Filho, 2000). It refers to the point that there is either underutilization or overutilization of the accepted criteria depending upon the choice of the stakeholders of the particular contexts.

In general, sustainability is viewed as a process aimed at maintaining balance within an ecosystem, making it a neutral term that emphasizes maintaining life harmoniously. Sustainability varies across different disciplines, and the term “sustainable development” adds further ambiguity. There

is a noticeable lack of clear and straightforward definitions in the literature on sustainable development (Raza, et al., 2023). Some approaches emphasize frameworks or processes, such as: addressing needs, managing resources, and understanding complexity and limits (Quental, Lourenço, & da Silva, 2011). This perspective focuses on the process rather than the result of the efforts of that process. Sustainable development is viewed as ensuring sustainability for future generations by offering principles and solutions to environmental and societal challenges and promoting positive change. We need to recognize that human society is inherently dynamic, adaptive and interactive with its complex environment, which is incapable of remaining static (Bossel, 1998; Barbosa, Drach & Corbella, 2014). So, the ideas of ‘balance’, ‘maintenance’, and ‘durability’ generally associated with sustainability seem to be context-dependent and ever-fluctuating.

Accordingly, the sources are highlighted in the definitions, e.g., Jabareen (2008) identified seven sources that define sustainable development: “ethical paradox, equity, global agenda, eco-form, utopia, integrative management, and natural capital stock” (Gibson, 2000, p. 11 as cited in Waas, Hugé, Verbruggen & Wright, 2011, p. 1640). Development in terms of these sources seems wholesomeness, but it is not free from paradoxical orientations. This discussion can provide context and highlight areas of relative strength or weakness. There have been a few studies defining campus sustainability clearly, especially in the context of higher education in Pakistan. This article bridges this gap and highlights major focal points in the campus sustainability discourse. The main research questions of this study are as follows:

Q1. What are the common narrative and dominant themes in campus sustainability discourse?

Q2. How do campus sustainability initiatives reflect or challenge broader societal sustainability discourses all over the world and especially in Pakistan?

Q3. What types of sustainability initiatives are most commonly implemented in university campuses (e.g., energy efficiency, waste reduction and transportation)?

It is vital for administrators and educators at institutes of higher education to understand how sustainability definitions are tied to an institution's goals, visions, ecology, and social and material circumstances. This study reveals major viewpoints, research findings and frameworks regarding the concept of sustainability and the key measures needed for the campuses in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

Design and Sample

The relevant topic or subject-specific databases were reviewed e.g., Google Scholar, Scopus, etc. peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, web links, and conference papers published in English. More than 300 papers were read to get an overview. They were carefully filtered keeping in mind the research questions of the study. Finally, only those studies were included that meet the eligibility criteria. (Sukhera, 2022). This study follows a narrative review where existing literature is presented and critiqued to develop an inclusive understanding of the campus sustainability discourse.

Methodology

The narrative review, being synonymous with terms like *traditional review*, *narrative overview*, *non-systemic review*, and *un-systemic review* (Geibel, et al., 2016; Jesson & Lacey, 2006), is

preferred as a research strategy due to its flexibility and practicality. It provides a framework for general background, and critiques research. Interpretations are offered by all types of narrative review which allow critique and variations depending on the context and the authors as they “do not offer an evidence-based synthesis for focused questions, nor do they offer definitive guideline statements” (Sukhera, 2022, p. 416).

A review article is of various types. The two classifications are of traditional or non-systemic or narrative review and systemic review (Potter, 2004; Jesson & Lacey, 2006; Geibel, et al., 2016) while Green et al. (2006) noticed only three basic types of review: *Narrative review*, *Qualitative Systemic review* and *Qualitative Meta-analysis* (Sukhera, 2022, p. 17) .

Data collection and analysis Techniques

Data extraction was done in terms of different research designs, methodologies, different sustainability discourse themes, ecological or geographic focus, and mostly key findings or conclusions. Gaps were identified in the existing literature. Note-taking was done and collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and understudied themes or geographic regions or lack of interdisciplinary research. Findings were integrated to identify areas of consensus, arguments or implications for research, policy and practice.

The potential output of this study presents a comprehensive review probing the conceptual frameworks for understanding sustainability discourse. This led to the identification of research gaps, future directions, and contributions to policy and practice debates.

Discursive diversity in sustainability discourses

The concept of sustainability (SD) means different things to different people, organizations and think tanks which determine the focus of such discourses as they facilitate the legitimization of sociopolitical agendas. Several global environmental governance scholars have identified four major sustainability frames prevalent in Stevenson and Dryzek's (2012) categorization (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011; Hajer, 1995; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014), saying "mainstream sustainability, progressive sustainability, a limits discourse, and radical sustainability" (Sénit, 2020, p. 415).

Such discourses are usually exercised by the administration, policy, and decision-makers who are responsible for different framings of sustainability at the government or private sector negotiations, creating discursive diversity of global policymaking and influencing the discourses evolving in the public space (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2012; Dryzek, 2000 as cited in Sénit, 2020, p. 415).

A conservative approach, "mainstream sustainability", focusing on both economic and political areas, holds the global or institutional powers responsible for decisions and regulations about change and progress. Environmental sustainability has to be catered to keep the political and economic resources in view. Transformation is only possible through technology and market dynamics promoting industrialization, job opportunities, profits, and investments. Sustainability in growth is achieved through the commodification of nature, as an external factor to the human world, providing services and benefits to the economy (Sénit, 2020, p. 416), and Pakistani HEIs take it seriously.

On the other hand, progressive sustainability carries a conservative approach toward economy. Redistribution of power by putting the developed and developing countries is important for development. Equity is achieved through both government and civil society regulating energy conservation and efficiency giving economic incentives and funds for technology transfer and investments to developing countries. Economic growth, being still the central focus, is coupled with the conservation of nature which is still commodified for the purpose of sustaining development gains (Sénit, 2020, p. 417). It is considered very weak in the system of Pakistani HEIs.

The third type, a limits discourse is a politically conservative but an economically reformist approach to sustainability. Globally, the redistribution of power is not needed and governments or civil society can take charge but a revolutionary reorientation of the economy, and usually the concerned authorities or volunteers take charge of the positive changes and maintenance of environmental sustainability. Ecology takes the driving seat to allow or constrain, both economically and demographically the development of human societies (Sénit, 2020).

Fourth, radical sustainability is a thoroughly transformative approach aiming to revolutionize the existing global economic and political systems and strive for equity of human rights and justice in society. It strongly adheres to environmental sustainability and limitations of ecology personifying 'Nature' as part of human societies and not an external factor as a commodity. It advocates for small-scale community development while working on enabling all types of rights like human, social, economic, and even the rights of nature, motivating collaboration or initiatives (Sénit, 2020). Both limits and radical types of discourses are invisible forms in Pakistani HEIs.

The acceptance status of agents or actors involved in this discourse has always put various limitations. The progressive sustainability is the most favored in the framing of issues but one of its drawbacks is that it fails to provide the framing of the optimum level of social responsibility and equity in the negotiations about global sustainable development challenges and the subjective issues of various marginalized areas or groups cannot be addressed. The frequency of such framings is also less in radical sustainability and a limits discourse (Sénit, 2020).

Discursive representation of negotiations of sustainable development goals has shown the biases of actors or communicators involved in global policy making e.g., the developing countries were given more prominence and presentation opportunities. Civil societies are not very functional as framing the consensus discourse at the global level is mostly done by the state governments (Sénit, 2020).

Sustainability in higher education

The concept of sustainability has become a widely accepted and popular notion in higher education institutes all over the world. The sustainability concern in education is quite important in the American context as Weisser (2017) points out that there is an Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) which includes more than 800 universities and “the higher education sustainability movement supports an ever-expanding number of trade journals, national conferences, and other mechanisms to promote campus sustainability” (pp. 1076-1077).

Translating this concept of sustainability to gauge the quality of higher education varies regarding different contexts. The term *sustainability* in the academic, social and private sectors is commonly emphasized in the context of maintaining the balanced coexistence of humanity and the

environment (Robinson, 2004). Contrastingly, the business and government sectors often replace it with *sustainable development* connoting the “process of development” through economic growth (Hector, 2014, p. 12) which often refers to the means or process to achieve the target goals. Some take it as a utopian concept relating it to Romanticism portraying nature’s sacred and harmonious relationship with humanity (Hector, Christensen & Petrie, 2014), an aspect that is largely absent from the idea of “sustainable development”. This synchronization is often deemed essential by most of the schools of thought for the assessment of sustainable measures and including it in their discourse despite their status of being fuzzy buzzwords with multiple interpretations.

In the higher education scenario, the term ‘sustainability’ emerges as a key concept in motivating research and the administration, faculty, and students to work towards environmental and energy challenges (Cortese, 2003); *sustainability* often aligns with that of *sustainable development*. As a result, these terms are used interchangeably. The UN highlights the significance attached to this area, especially for the developing countries. Along with framing the organizational policies, the employment of the theme is the most challenging as it is not just awareness activities but involves composing and integrating inter-disciplinary content, value system, teaching and creativity.

University definitions

It has become a common trend among universities to show ‘sustainability’ as part of their main vision, mission or goals, though emphasizing different aspects and definitions. “Sustainability is a ubiquitous term in higher education, appearing frequently and prominently on a wide range of university websites, flyers and other public documents” (Weisser, 2017, p. 1083) Most of the Pakistani universities do not have a definition of sustainability clearly expressed in their manifestos or websites. Moreover, even if they have shown it on the websites, this is the same definition of

UN reports represented as their goals till 2030. Collocating the term *sustainability* with *campus* means involving the institutional structure with economic, ecological and energy-related initiatives (Emanuel & Adams, 2011).

Significant trends

University definitions of sustainability follow the preexisting ideological framework of sustainability used at official and government levels usually following the “three pillars” metaphor — *education, research, and service*. Rather than seeing this concept as an add-on or isolated project, this broadens the scope for institutional leaders to view it as essential to the core mission of universities. The association of environmental responsibility with economic benefits; innovation, technological problem-solving, and social responsibility are some of the most common trends. The notion of time in the definition of sustainability is quite unique as

“Many university texts make use of narrative to suggest and reify a temporal orientation: a schema of past, present and future saturates university literature on sustainability. The past is often envisioned as a site of memory, reflecting a rhetoric of loss, return and recovery. The present is conceived as a moment of crisis and choice, rhetoric of exigence marks this narrative trope” (Weisser, 2017, p. 1085).

The universities’ sustainability discourse carries an element of temporality and it reveals a great deal about our collective vision of the world and the ways in which the term shapes and limits the enactment of potential futures” (Weisser, 2017, p. 1085). The recent development of new models and indicators of sustainability shows interesting moves and shifts e.g., green neighbourhoods, waste management, sustainable urban development, campus sustainability, reduction of carbon

footprint, as well as developing country-specific sustainability evaluation index (Olawumi & Chan, 2018, pp. 37-38).

Deleye (2024)) presents a comprehensive empirical analysis of the discursive construction of the concept of the *sustainable university* through a vast array of scientific literature by examining 4,584 publications. Highlighting the three primary discourses: *the sustainable higher education institution, the engaged community, and the green-tech campus*. The study is insightful as it frames the sustainability discussion within three actionable, distinct and relatable categories. This framing was built on prior research, connecting existing theoretical frameworks from Henderson et al. (2017), Findler et al. (2019), Leal Filho (2011) and Lozano et al. (2015), creating a six-domain framework of university sustainability engagement.

Studies

Sustainability communication in higher education institutes encompasses a formal outline and plans about core issues, dialogue with the concerned stakeholders, and taking proper steps to activate changes in lifestyle. This type of communication consists of much more than mere one-sided dissemination of information. It also includes the discourse of sustainable development as a “narrative construct in which the discourse serves to frame and perform specified sustainable actions” (Newig, et al., 2013 as cited in Musso, Pinna , & Carrus,, 2021, pp. 237-238). For example, it involves motivating people to adopt new technologies, related to transport, cleaner production, materials; convincing them to be responsible and transforming their behavior” (Bucur & Petra, 2011, p. 48 as cited in Musso, Pinna & Carrus,, 2021, pp. 237-238).

Language discourse about sustainability practices on university websites of U.S. was studied by examining the university mission statements which elucidate that there is a greater plausibility of

higher sustainability ratings of those universities that use a more number of specific terms in their mission statements. Religious affiliation and the type of sector (public/private) of the institutions are significant factors and the private sector or nonreligious-affiliated institutions are more prospective in terms of the inclusion of sustainability concepts in their mission statements (Lopez & Martin, 2018).

In the Italian universities' context, a study about using social media to communicate sustainability by using the method of content analysis selecting the posted sustainability messages from the list of the Italian University Network for Sustainable Development was carried out. It confirms three main functions of universities' social media concerning sustainability communication, i.e., disseminating information, facilitating action and fostering community creation. The results reveal that universities mainly use social platforms for action-oriented communication. (Musso, Pinna, & Carrus).

Though websites are the main discourses of marketization, it has been found that the verbal and non-verbal signifiers promote the university not only by giving information but also by creating a sense of achieving a new lifestyle and personal transformation or values that adhere to campus sustainability discourse not in the sense of particularly academic activities but in the sense of the frames of personality grooming, values, well-being, new experiences or exposure. A study on the website of the National University of Singapore over 14 years analyzed visual-spatial features and action potentials of progressive versions of the site. It reveals that the changing discourses of marketization are being transformed in the website functions. From exhibiting information about their unique features/services/resources and academic expertise "to addressing potential students as consumers of goods and of products offered by the university" (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013, p.

468) and now “the website pointing not so much to education as a process of learning and mentoring but as a type of lifestyle, experience, and abstracted personal transformation and journey” (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013, p. 468).

Campus Sustainability Discourse in the Context of Pakistan

Three different perspectives about the discourse of sustainability are in vogue i.e., communication *of* sustainability; *about* sustainability; and *for* sustainability. The first type has the intention to persuade by transmitting information, whereas the second type involves dialogic processes providing space for debate on opinions and exchange on sustainability issues (Newig, et al., 2013 as cited in Musso, Pinna & Carrus, 2021).

Communication for sustainability is the practical type of discourse instructions about how this information and opinions would be put into action. The crucial role of campus sustainability movements must not be denied as it “finally raises some important ethical, technological and ecological questions about the environmental role of the university” (Weisser, 2017, p. 1077).

Exploration of the role of private sector was aimed at a study in the Pakistani context that probed the views of the faculty members working in private sector HEIs in Punjab and found that they have a critical role in the advancement of sustainability. In Pakistan, this concept is still in its early stages with limited research attention. All the participants in that study recognized private HEIs in Pakistan as hubs of knowledge-generation with the potential to drive the sustainable development “through faculty training and active involvement of all the stakeholders and action-oriented research” (Waqas, Rehman, & Rehman, 2019, p. 19). However, their progress is impeded by several significant barriers, including limited funding, a weak research culture, faculty ineffectiveness, and insufficient management support to foster innovative solutions for sustainable

development, it was suggested to utilize resources in terms of creating conducive classroom environments, implementing effective curricula, leveraging appropriate technologies, focusing on solution-based research, and developing robust infrastructure (Waqas, Rehman & Rehman, 2019).

Effective leadership with technical, interpersonal and professional development skills is the ingredient that is considered to be the most important in the achievement of sustainability goals in HEIs across private and public sectors. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives within HEIs can also support societal and environmental change. Private HEIs show a stronger grasp of sustainability across social, economic and environmental aspects, as well as excelling in student development, community engagement, and fostering social values in contrast to public HEIs. However, private HEIs in Pakistan face challenges, such as limitations in sustainability investments, teacher competency, and classroom learning approaches (Hinduja, Mohammad, Siddiqui, Noor & Hussain, 2023).

Integration of the SDGs in ADPs (Annual Development Program) could be an effective measure on yearly basis, and it may become a focal point of discourse in Pakistan. Vigilant research, policy-making and development mechanisms, effective course designing, monitoring and implementation are considered indispensable for maintaining sustainable measures in Pakistani HEIs (ul Hassan, 2021). The researchers emphasize that higher education institutions (HEIs) alone cannot address quality and equity issues; support from the state, parents, funding agencies, and professionals is essential. The sustainability vision for Pakistan includes consideration of social and political stability i.e., “Pakistan Vision 2025 document has five enablers and seven pillars. The five enablers comprise political stability and continuity of policies, shared vision, rule of law, social justice, and peace and security” (ul Hassan, 2021, p. 64).

Most of the researchers concluded that a conceptual understanding of ESD, emphasizing its role in enhancing the quality of life and educational quality for all stakeholders—including parents and students—can drive sustainability efforts in higher education. Progress is noted in campus operations and outreach, with HEIs focusing on infrastructure, energy efficiency, waste management, water, transport, food, grounds, and pollution prevention. Outreach efforts include web-based sustainability initiatives, community projects, awareness campaigns and problem-solving activities (Hinduja, Mohammad, Siddiqui, Noor, & Hussain, 2023). These themes are useful to formulate localized goals for Pakistani higher education ecology.

Discussion & critique

Weisser (2017) reviewed the rhetorical uses of the term among various institutions within the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), especially in US higher education. The findings of his study revealed the similar fluidity or elasticity in the university definitions of sustainability as those of the political and public discourses whereas specific trends “in which concepts of interconnection, technological problem-solving, and temporality persist in definitions of the term in higher education” (p. 1076) were also found out.

In the recent years, the higher education sustainability movements have promoted campus sustainability through a number of mechanisms, activities, academic scholarship, journals and conferences. Contemporary education system has not only given us a better life style and higher progress level but also concerns about well-being and balancing the ecosystem. It is due to its drawback that it has taught us to meddle with or dominate nature more than to be concerned about maintaining these life systems (Orr, 1992). This is one of the main reasons that highly educated and qualified people bear more responsibility of carrying out an effective discourse about

sustaining not only of their campus systems but also of the society and ecology in which these systems exist.

It has been observed that many institutions formulate their own definitions based on local goals and contexts, as Katherine Owens and Sasha Legere concluded that there is ambiguity among scholars, professionals and policy makers as they state different definitions and conceptions of the term *sustainability* (2015) leading to “a kind of disconnect between choices in reality and a “sustainable’ future” (Owens & Legere, 2015, p. 380). Various groups or individuals compose definitions of sustainability that is suitable for them according to their intended objectives which guide towards the following material and intellectual actions needed to be carried out on those lines. The term sustainability “has become a plastic but potent signifier” (Alaimo, 2012, p. 559) signifying related assumptions, ideologies, visions and perspectives in higher education.

The term *campus sustainability* carries relative agendas and ideologies in various definitions of sustainability. One university might focus on campus planning and development to follow sustainable measures. Yet another one sees the projects and initiatives as cornerstone of sustainability such as green building initiatives, campus greening drives, recycling or energy conservation programs. Some universities might view sustainability in terms of economic and financial concerns while others emphasize sustainability through corporate measures (Weisser, 2017). The variation is due to the current structure of academic institutions where they are basically unable to address sustainability properly (Miller, Munoz-Erickson & Redman, 2001).

Some critics and scholars see this term as part of *cultural keywords* which reflect the beliefs, ideologies, and power structures of the respective culture (Williams, 1977) because they are “the servants of too many interests to keep to single, clearly defined jobs” (Richards, 1994, p. 23). It is

often observed that most definitions of sustainability have their roots in Western culture. The term was first used in German forestry studies in terms of utilizing the forest resources for current and future generations. It has the potential meanings of conserving natural ecosystem but also utilizing it to satisfy human needs, social or political stability, and the role of technology and knowledge in utilizing the resources (Weisser, 2017). It has been widely associated with environmentalism but, in fact, the very essence of the language of sustainability calls for a positive change in every field of life.

In the corporate language, a famous phrase is *people, planet, profit*. Coined by corporate responsibility advocate John Elkington (1997), this interrelationship among the environment, society and economy, are in a reciprocal relationship with each other, and is covered in the concept of sustainability. One largely accepted principle is ‘equity’, which is commonly acceptable in all sustainability definitions with always a positive connotation (Dixon & Fallon, 1989).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Peter Goggin talks about narratives of sustainability as a part of social and political influence as an “important issue for ordaining change towards an ecological future on local and national levels, serving distinctive interests and political pragmatism (Goggin, 2009). The perception of the term ‘sustainability’ thus has become a signifier which keeps on changing the meaning according to local ecology and context as “sustainability can be seen as a floating signifier.... Groups and individuals attempt to fix meaning to the term, thereby gaining hegemony over it,..” (Weisser, 2017, p. 1082).

Language and discourses are largely affected by the hegemonic relationships and this also pervades the main terms of social, cultural and academic rubric in a way that these hegemonic practices

have the power to define and assign specific meanings to words or concepts. This, ultimately, shapes reality and influences the other material practices. The fluidity of this relationship between the signifier and the signified creates a discursive space where meanings can be negotiated. This points to ‘partial stability’ which makes certain interpretations appear usual, spontaneous and self-evident (Weisser, 2017, p. 1083). One of its examples is the 1987 Brundtland’s definition in which the meaning of the term ‘sustainability’ is stable which is referenced even after 25 years. The reason is that it was stated by powerful global leaders and designed for broader applications, and achieved a node point which serves as a focal point of contextual, discrete, and localized interpretations of sustainability (Weisser, 2017). However, the previous reviews on sustainability “have focused mainly on environmental sustainability” (Olawumi & Chan, 2018, p. 3), a gap that the current study tends to bridge.

Deleye’s (2024) article provides a valuable empirical contribution to understanding how the concept of a *sustainable university* is being constructed in academic discourse. While the analysis is thorough and well-grounded in existing literature, a deeper critique of the identified discourses and a broader, more inclusive perspective on global sustainability challenges in universities would enhance the impact of the study. Nevertheless, the research presents a solid foundation for further debate and action on what a sustainable university could and should look like.

The discursive formulations of *campus sustainability* are too many in higher education that it is impossible to recount all of them here. So, the following points highlight some important limitations and areas for improvement after the brief inferences and summarized readings.

There is a lack of critical engagement with the dominant discourses. While the previous and current research provides a useful categorization of discourses, there is a limited critique of the

implications of each discourse. For example, the *green-tech campus* focuses on technological solutions and campus infrastructure. Still, most studies do not interrogate whether this could lead to a commodification of sustainability or the privileges got by wealthy institutions over others. Similarly, the *engaged community* discourse could be further critiqued regarding how power dynamics within and beyond the university shape these engagements.

The potential oversight of institutional challenges is also a grey area. Although contemporary research highlights the domains for integrating sustainability, it does not sufficiently explore the potential institutional, financial or bureaucratic challenges the universities may face in implementing these ideals. Without addressing these challenges, the framework could be seen as overly optimistic and difficult to operationalize, especially in underfunded or resource-constrained universities.

The dominance of west-centric perspectives is a great barrier in composing clear goals for the local ecology. The majority of the studies and frameworks cited (e.g., Henderson et al., Leal Filho, Lozano et al.) are from Western academic contexts, which may limit the applicability of the findings to universities in different socio-economic, political and cultural settings. There is little discussion on how non-western institutions or universities in the Global South engage with sustainability, which could have enriched the analysis by providing a more global perspective.

There is a limited focus on student engagement in this discourse. *Campus experience* as one of the domains is being discussed in this discourse, but the studies do not delve deeply into how students themselves engage with sustainability. Given that students are often key agents of change in driving sustainability movements on campus, more attention to their role, motivations and

challenges in participating in sustainability initiatives would have added another valuable dimension to the current analyses being done.

A wide range of concerns are needed to be explored in further studies like university's stance of sustainability as the focal point in terms of certain variables such as race, class, gender and culture, the areas of economics and ethics sharing common and uncommon grounds in local, regional and national settings, the influence of visual rhetoric, the effect of pedagogy in raising awareness, etc. It is the demand of the present times to study and analyze the ways in which Pakistani institutions draw upon existing definitions of sustainability, create new definitions of sustainability based on regional and national contexts and thus redesign the material realities of the concept of sustainable development in the contemporary university system (Weisser, 2017). The analysis of discursive representation in the SDGs negotiations show the discourse at the forum of United Nations is not representative of the whole world. As Carant (2017) calls it, "a World Social Forum discourse," which is "largely unheard in the articulation of the SDGs because the UN has failed to produce the transformational systemic shifts necessary for long-term, sustainable and equitable change for all" (p. 34).

Therefore, reformation of discursive representation is the need of the hour pointing out how and where it has to be implemented to bring equity in discourse. Identification of conditions in which a free and justified space is provided to express the viewpoints of all. "So as to provide a legitimacy check on to which degree global policymaking features a comprehensive and accurate range of discourses on sustainability" (Sénit, 2020, pp. 426-427).

Today's world is the world of time management and results, and sustainability is a phenomenon that is both fluid and fixed at the same time in many contexts. So, it is hard for the researchers to

keep standard criteria for evaluating campus sustainability discourse for all types of institutions. The factors such as context, ecology, administrative structures, needs, goals, etc. play a contributing role in such decisions to assess and monitor the discourse types and the variants around them. It is also endorsed that there is variation of answers according to the HEIs' policies and society's responses. However, the difficulty of defining what is to be sustainable development for them is not seen as a problem for all sectors of HEIS currently.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The article opens up several avenues for future research. It lays the groundwork for investigating how different institutions interpret and operationalize sustainability, and whether certain discourses are more dominant in specific regions, cultures or types of institutions (e.g., research vs. teaching-focused universities). Moreover, further research could explore how institutional barriers and enablers impact the successful integration of sustainability across the six domains presented in the framework. Lastly, examining how students, faculty and administrators negotiate these discourses could provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in building a sustainable university.

In terms of practice, universities could use the framework as a self-assessment tool to evaluate their current engagement with sustainability and identify areas for improvement. Policymakers and funding bodies may also look to these findings to guide the development of policies and grants that support more sustainable practices in higher education.

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