

SDG 4.7: Fostering Global Citizenship

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Abstract

Education for all (EFA) is an essential prerequisite of sustainable development. In addition to literacy and numeracy, education for today and tomorrow should equip learners with higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as critical-thinking and social and emotional skills to engage constructively with the uncertain and rapidly changing world. It is not sufficient for education to merely adapt to changing societal needs. It needs to be transformative. Values-based and action-oriented education, including education for sustainable development (ESD), GCED, and other related areas, are now encapsulated in SDG 4.7. This article discusses how SDG 4.7 is critical in achieving not only SDG 4 on education, but also achieving the other 16 SDGs.

Introduction

The interconnected environmental, economic, social, and political challenges facing humanity call for education that cultivates a sense of belonging to common humanity and responsibility to take action to address these challenges. The “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” is an intergovernmental commitment and “a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity” comprising 17 SDGs (UN, 2015). Education is articulated as a stand-alone goal (SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) with seven outcome targets and three means of implementation (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 12: SDG 4 Targets

Target	Detail
4.1	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
4.2	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university.

Table 12: SDG 4 Targets	
Target	Detail
4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, amongst others, through ESD and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Table 13: SDG 4 Implementation Means	
Implementation Means	Detail
4.A	Build and upgrade educational facilities that are child-, disability-, and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.
4.B	By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least-developed countries, small island developing states, and African countries, for enrollment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communication technology (ICT), technical, engineering, and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.
4.C	By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least-developed countries and small island developing states.

EFA: A Prerequisite to Sustainable Development

The principles underlying SDG 4 are deeply rooted in the intrinsic—as opposed to instrumental—value of education and a humanistic vision of education, which UNESCO has championed since its inception. First of all, education is a fundamental human right. The state bears a duty to ensure universal access to inclusive and equitable quality education. Secondly, education is a public good and a shared societal endeavour (UNESCO, 2015). Not only the governments, but also civil society, teachers and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth, and children all have important roles in realising the right to quality education.

EFA is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development. On one hand, SDG 4 is about continuing with the unfinished business of EFA. Targets 4.1 through 4.6 focus largely on expanding access to education and equipping learners with skills for employability. On the other hand, while these are no doubt important goals, they do not raise critical questions regarding the fundamental purposes of education. In other words, they aim at enabling learners to adapt to and succeed in society as it exists today—rather than “transforming our world” as being called for by the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (UN, 2015).

SDG 4.7: Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

In addition to literacy and numeracy, education for today and tomorrow should equip learners with HOTS (such as critical-thinking skills) and social and emotional skills to engage constructively with the uncertain and rapidly changing world. It is not sufficient if education is merely adaptive to the changing societal needs; education needs to be transformative (UNESCO, 2015). Values-based and action-oriented education—including ESD, GCED, peace and human rights education, environmental education, development education, global learning, inter-cultural education, EIU, and others—is now encapsulated in SDG 4 Target 7 (SDG 4.7).

Promoting peace and sustainable development through education is one of UNESCO's core missions and is now enshrined in SDG 4.7 as one of the goals, which nations around the globe aspire to achieve. There is a need to ensure education systems help build peaceful and sustainable societies. This includes ensuring that education systems help develop knowledge and skills necessary to foster mutual understanding, respect, and care amongst all people and for the planet we share and to engage responsibly and creatively with the changing world. This is critical not only to achieve SDG 4.7, but also to support the implementation of all 17 SDGs. Education in the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (UN, 2015) is not restricted to SDG 4. Education is specifically mentioned in targets of the five goals listed below, but also linked to virtually all of the other SDGs in one way or another:

- **Target 3.7: Health and well-being:** By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health in national strategies and programmes.
- **Target 5.6: Gender equality:** The number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15–49 have access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, information, and education.
- **Target 8.6: Decent work and economic growth:** By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training.
- **Target 12.8: Responsible consumption and production:** By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

- **Target 13.3: Climate change mitigation:** Improve education, awareness raising, and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning.

Conclusion

Ways Forward

Awareness and knowledge about sustainable development is not sufficient to foster competencies required for shaping more peaceful and sustainable societies. There is an increasing consensus on the critical importance of social and emotional skills (sometimes referred to as “soft skills”), in addition to “cognitive” skills (including both the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy and HOTS such as critical thinking). Today’s education for the uncertain future should cultivate intelligence that integrates reason and emotion.

It is vital to give a central place to strengthening education’s contribution to the fulfillment of human rights, peace, and responsible citizenship from local to global levels. One of the pathways to foster the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions, and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges is to integrate the principles and values of sustainable development at the heart of the curriculum of core subjects, rather than inserting new thematic content into the already-overburdened curriculum (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017a and 2017b).

MGIEP is an integral part of UNESCO and its specialist institute on education for peace, sustainable development, and global citizenship. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of schooling (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017a) and proposes a strategy to integrate SDG 4.7 in core subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages to reorient education towards sustainability (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017b). While often treated as mere add-ons to gear schools for the 21st century, the notions of “sustainable development” and “global citizenship” fundamentally challenge the dominant discourses and practices of education today. To achieve the SDGs, we would need a culture of collaboration, care, and peaceful coexistence, not that of competition and pursuing individual and nationalistic gains. SDG 4.7 is about learning to live together on a planet under pressure—the planet we all share. To this end, policy-makers are encouraged to start embracing education not primarily as a tool for allowing people to participate in the global economy, but as a holistic experience of positive personal and cultural transformation.

Disclaimer: The ideas and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO or UNESCO MGIEP and do not commit the organisation.

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