

Sustainable Management Practices in Education: Economic and Legal Perspectives

Jose Sergio Magdaleno-Palencia^{1*}, Dr. Ahmet Niyazi ÖZKER², César Lozano-Levano³, Clara Luz Gallegos Parra⁴

¹National Technological Institute of Mexico, Tijuana Campus

Email:ID: jmagdaleno@tectijuana.edu.mx

²Bandirma Onyedi Eylul University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Public Finance Department 10200-TÜRKİYE,

Email:ID: niyaziozker@yahoo.com

Orcid ID: [0000-0001-5313-246X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5313-246X)

³Doctor en Gestión Pública Universidad César Vallejo _ Lima Norte Peru

Email:ID: lozanolev@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

⁴Subject-Assigned Lecturer Veracruzana University

Email:ID: clgallegos@uv.mx

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5276-979X>

ABSTRACT

Sustainable management practices in education have become increasingly important as education systems face growing financial pressures, regulatory demands, and expectations to contribute to sustainable development. This study examines sustainable management practices in education through an integrated economic and legal perspective, using secondary data from internationally recognized sources. A comparative, descriptive research design is employed to analyze economic indicators related to education financing and access alongside legal and governance variables, including constitutional recognition of the right to education, sustainability-oriented policies, and governance decentralization. The findings reveal that education systems characterized by higher levels of public investment, supportive legal frameworks, and decentralized governance structures demonstrate stronger sustainability performance, particularly in terms of access and progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4. The results further indicate that economic efficiency and legal accountability are mutually reinforcing, with effective governance mechanisms playing a critical role in translating legal commitments into sustainable institutional practices. By integrating economic and legal dimensions, this study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship on sustainability in education and provides policy-relevant insights for strengthening governance and management frameworks. The findings underscore the need for coherent strategies that align financial sustainability with enforceable legal obligations to support long-term educational resilience and equitable development

Keywords: Sustainable management, education systems, economic sustainability, legal frameworks, governance

INTRODUCTION:

Education systems worldwide are increasingly confronted with sustainability challenges arising from financial constraints, governance inefficiencies, and intensifying regulatory pressures. Increased costs of operation, reduced government funding, and the increase in accountability demands has placed significant pressure on educational institutions especially the government and higher education sectors. Meanwhile, fragmented governance systems, and policy implementation inconsistencies tend to hamper successful introduction of principles of sustainability in institutional management. The need to find approaches to managing challenges that would enable high financial sustainability and at the same time guarantee a high quality of education and equity has grown (Al-Zawahreh et al., 2019; Figueiró and Raufflet,

2015).

Education has been central in supporting sustainable development through creation of human capital, social inclusions and economic development. This is officially established in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) of the United Nations that focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education as a pathway to sustainable societies. In addition to its pedagogical role, education is becoming more and more expected to be exemplary in the aspects of sustainability in institutional governance, responsible management of resources and practices within organizations that are consistent with the wider development goals. Consequently, schools are becoming considered as participants in the process of sustainability transitions and not as receivers of policy requirements (Leicht and Heiss, 2018; Oikawa, 2014; Žalėnienė and Pereira, 2021).

To meet these demands, the sustainable management practice in education has been on the limelight as a strategic model to deal with the economic and regulatory challenges. Sustainable management is not only about the environmental programs, but also financial efficiency, ethical management and the long-term strategic planning. In the case of higher education specifically, the models of leadership that are oriented at sustainability or digital transformation and interdisciplinary approaches have been implemented at the institutional level to introduce sustainability into the process of organizational decision-making (Abad-Segura et al., 2020; Abdelgaffar, 2021). These practices aim to reconcile the performance of financial performance and institutional accountability and address changing policy needs and the needs of stakeholders.

Although the scholarly interest in sustainability in the field of education is on the rise, current studies tend to address the economic and legal aspects separately. Research primarily focuses on pedagogical innovation, leadership, or environmental projects whereas the financial sustainability and legal governance are not well-organized. Legal analyses, as their part, often concentrate on the rights-based paradigm or compliance with the regulations but lack adequate interest in the economic reality that educational institutions encounter. Additionally, despite the availability of a large amount of secondary data available on education finance, governance, and sustainability indicators through international bodies, these data are seldom combined in interdisciplinary studies to investigate the relationship between economic performance and legal accountability (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Kassaneh et al., 2021). In filling this void, this paper will take an economic and legal approach to investigate sustainable management practices in the education sector with reference to secondary global data to produce policy implications of sustainability and governance in institutions (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Management in Education

Research Objectives

1. To assess sustainable management practices in education using key economic and governance indicators
2. To examine the role of legal frameworks in enabling sustainable management within education systems

3. To analyze the interaction between economic performance and legal accountability in promoting sustainability in education

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Sustainable Management in Education: Global Trends

Education sustainable management has been receiving growing international interest as institutions are called on to play important roles in promoting sustainable development other than their usual teaching duties. The models of sustainability-related governance focus on the approach of incorporating the environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability in the institutional strategy and decision-making procedures. These models advocate the change in traditional administrative models into holistic and adaptable governance frameworks that can reconnect institutional missions to sustainability goals (Jones et al., 2010; Sterling and Huckle, 2014).

The tendencies in the world indicate the focus on stakeholder-oriented and interdisciplinary solutions in ensuring the sustainability in the education systems. It is presumed that interdisciplinary governance and teaching practices may be essential to address complex cross-disciplinary and cross-organizational sustainability issues (Metzger et al., 2017). Moreover, the participation of stakeholders (administrators, faculty, students, policymakers, and external partners) in ensuring sustainability in institutional cultures and governance systems has been placed as a vital requirement (Abad-Segura et al., 2020). Education on sustainable development as a global agenda also underscores the fact that sustainability should also be manifest through the curricula but also institutional management and practices in governance (Leicht, Heiss, 2018; Oikawa, 2014).

2.2 Economic Perspectives on Sustainability in Education

Economic views on sustainability in education are geared towards financial strength, provision of resource efficiency and economic returns in the long-term. The financing models needed in sustainable education systems must be cost effective and quality and accessible as well as equitable. With limited funding on the part of the population, institutions are moving towards strategic planning and performance-based management to improve sustainability in the economy (Abad-Segura et al., 2020). It is a well-known fact that education is one of the key investments in human capital and the sustainable economy. Education investments also lead to productivity and innovation and provide social mobility, which supports the opinion that education spending brings long-term economic returns and not short-term fiscal expenditures (Jones et al., 2010; Sterling and Huckle, 2014). Nevertheless, economic efficiency is not enough to provide sustainability because the financial decision-making process should be supported with regulatory practices and social obligations.

2.3 Legal and Regulatory Frameworks in Education

Sustainable management in education has a structural basis that is legal and regulatory in nature as it specifies institutional requirements, accountability and governance processes. The constitutional status of education as a

basic right enforces state responsibilities in the areas of access, quality, and equity, which affects the sustainability implications in the education systems (Zhukova et al., 2024). Moreover, new legal frameworks are starting to cover the issues of sustainability, such as environmental responsibility, the role of digital transformation, and controlling online learning (Dudar et al., 2024).

Decentralization of governance and accountability tools are influential towards effectiveness of sustainability efforts. On the one hand, decentralized governance can strengthen the autonomy of institutions and societal innovation; on the other hand, due to low regulatory control, there can be a loss of consistency and responsibility in the policy. Legal clarity and regulatory consistency, in turn, are the prerequisites of the alignment of sustainability goals with institutional practices (Zhukova et al., 2024).

2.4 Integrated Economic–Legal Framework

A legal framework that is integrated into economic sphere can be used as a holistic approach to comprehending sustainable management practices in education. The institutional theory focuses on the impact of formal rules and structures of governance on the organizational behavior, whereas the regulatory economics addresses the role that legal incentives and constraints play in the economic decision-making (Commons, 2024; Lescrauwaet et al., 2022). Sustainable education management is formed through the relationship between economic efficiency and legal accountability, which brings to focus the necessity of governance models that will bring financial sustainability and regulatory compliance. The conceptual framework developed here by means of the integrated framework gives the analysis of the current study on the topic of sustainable management practices in education systems (Figure 2) conceptual underpinning.

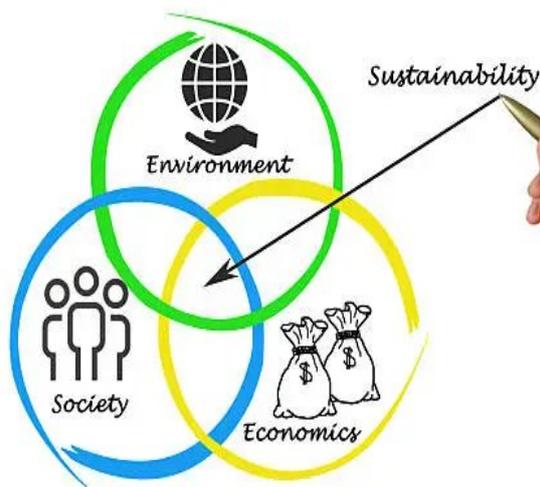


Figure 2: Integrated Sustainability Framework for Educational Management

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design used to examine the difference in sustainable management practices among education

systems is the cross-sectional comparative research design. This design enables the systematic analysis of economic performances and forms of legal-governance in the chosen national settings. Besides the quantitative analysis of descriptive statistics, to put the economic indicators into perspective and enhance interpretive validity, the qualitative analysis of the policy and legal text is also included.

3.2 Data Sources

Authoritative international databases, such as the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the World Bank Education Statistics (EdStats), and the OECD Education at a Glance reports had been used as secondary data. These sources deliver standardized and comparable data regarding education financing, enrolment pattern and sustainability-related measures. A legal and governance data were also obtained based on the publicly available national constitutions, education laws, and policy reports and international legal depositories like the Right to Education Initiative. The reliance on various data sources increases the level of data reliability and eliminates the source-related bias.

3.3 Variables and Measures

The paper uses a collection of indicators that reflect economic and legal aspects of sustainable management in the education sector. Education spending (as percent of GDP), government spending on education (as percent of total spending), and tertiary enrollment rates are considered as economic indicators. Where there are SDG-4-related indicators, sustainability performance is captured using these indicators. Legal and governance variables are constitutional acknowledgment of the right to education; existence of education policies related to sustainability and decentralization of governance and institutional accountability. The choice of these variables is determined by their applicability in the previous literature and availability in the international datasets.

3.4 Analytical Techniques

The analysis of data is carried out based on descriptive statistics to define trends and cross-country differences in sustainable management practices. The comparative analysis is used to evaluate the disparity in the economic performance and legal provisions of education systems. Besides that, legal and policy text is qualitatively content analyzed in order to understand the ways regulatory frameworks facilitate or inhibit sustainable management. Quantitative and qualitative methods help to evaluate the relationship between economic efficiency and legal accountability thoroughly because of the combination of both approaches.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

In order to improve validity, the research is based on information provided by the internationally acknowledged organizations using standardized data collection and reporting procedures. Triangulation results in increased reliability and reduced measurement bias. The analysis ensures internal coherence by keeping the conceptual consistency between the variables and the theoretical constructs.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Economic Indicators of Sustainable Management

The economic aspect of sustainable management in

education was measured in terms of indicators in terms of education financing, public expenditure and tertiary enrollment. Table 1 shows a comparative summary of major economic indicators of the chosen countries.

Table 1. Economic Indicators of Sustainable Management in Education

Country	Education Expenditure (% of GDP)	Public Education Expenditure (% of Total)	Tertiary Education Enrollment Rate (%)
USA	5.0	86	88
UK	5.6	82	79
India	4.1	75	28
Germany	4.8	88	70
Australia	5.3	90	95

These findings highlight the role of sustained public investment in promoting inclusive and economically sustainable education systems (Figure 3).

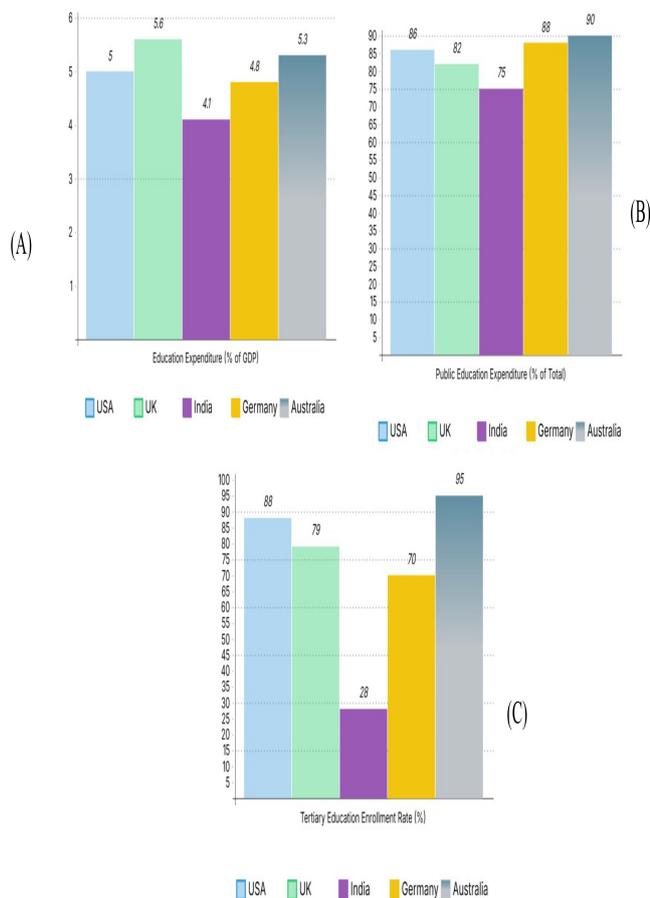


Figure 3: Comparative Economic Indicators of Sustainable Management in Education Systems

The figure (A) presents education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, Panel (B) shows public education expenditure shares, and Panel (C) illustrates tertiary enrollment rates, highlighting cross-country differences

in financing intensity, public commitment, and access to higher education.

4.2 Sustainability Performance and Legal Frameworks

The SDG-4 progress indicators and legal variables based on constitutional and policy variables were used to measure sustainability performance and legal commitments. All these sustainability and legal indicators are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Sustainability and Legal Indicators in Education

Country	SDG-4 Progress Index	Environmental Policy in Education (1 = Yes)	Right to Education (Constitutional) (1 = Yes)
USA	0.82	1	0
UK	0.85	1	0
India	0.61	1	1
Germany	0.84	1	1
Australia	0.87	1	1

Nevertheless, the right to education is not uniformly recognized as a constitutional right, and among the many countries, India, Germany, and Australia offer legal safeguards around the right to education, whereas the United States and the United Kingdom do not. This difference implies that favourable sustainability performance can be achieved by way of various legal avenues.

4.3 Governance Structures and Economic–Legal Interaction

The Education Governance Decentralization Index was used to determine the governance structures; this index indicates institutional independence and flexibility of decision making (Figure 4). The governance scores within the chosen countries are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Education Governance Decentralization Index

Country	Governance Decentralization Index
USA	0.72
UK	0.69
India	0.55
Germany	0.74
Australia	0.77

United States and United Kingdom are moderate in their levels of decentralization. In general, the evidence has shown that education systems with a robust level of public investment, a favorable legal environment, and decentralized governance are more likely to show a more desirable sustainability performance, which highlights the relevance of balancing economic efficiency with legal accountability.

Figure 4: Comparative Governance Decentralization in Education Systems

The figure illustrates cross-country variations in education governance decentralization, with Australia and Germany exhibiting higher institutional autonomy, while India shows more centralized governance, potentially influencing the flexibility and effectiveness of sustainability-oriented management practices in education systems.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this paper indicate that the most important factor in the decision of sustainable management practices used in the education systems is the economic ability, legal provisions, and governance provisions. The comparison shows that the nations, where the level of the public investment in education and decentralization of the government is higher, have more chances of obtaining the positive outcomes in sustainability. These results confirm the hypothesis that financial sustainability forms a fundamental element of institutional resilience and the long-term performance. According to the research on the sustainability of the economy, resource distribution and stable funding models can assist institutions in actively investing in quality, access, and innovation and promote sustainability objectives in the long term (Bartolacci et al., 2019; Bolívar, 2023).

The observed variation in the government financing and expenditure to education is an eye-opener to how education is an economic investment in the long-term and not a short-term financial burden. The countries with larger spending on government education and increased levels of tertiary education are demonstrating improved signs of inclusive and sustainable educational attainments. This conclusion aligns with the available literature on funding higher education, which emphasizes the notion that a long-range governmental investment in higher education would increase institutional capacities, lead to equity, and generate a wider range of economic and social benefits (Zumeta et al., 2021). Education financing in an integrated sustainability strategy does not contribute to the development of human capital only but additionally to the sustainability of the education system in the complex socio-economic conditions (Hariram et al., 2023).

Another critical factor that determines the success of management is sustainability in education, and it has its legal aspect as well. The fact that many states recognize constitutional right to education is a normative interest in education as a basic state requirement. These guarantees in the constitution increase accountability and provide a steady legal foundation of continuity of sustainability-oriented policies (Black, 2018; Bassu, 2024). These findings are consistent with the legal literature, which appears to imply that the constitutional and legislative frameworks play the leading role in instilling the principles of sustainability within the institution of the public governance (Satria, 2025; Aidonojie et al., 2025). Such findings however also suggest that the legal recognition is not of sufficient to achieve effective sustainability outcomes. Connection between the laws and the ability to govern appears to be a case-maker. The

increased levels of governance decentralization in education systems help to make the institutions flexible and adaptable to circumstances of offering context-specific sustainability initiatives and improved management of resources. This result is consistent with the perspectives of law and economics according to which the operation of regulatory activities is dependent on the presence of the institutional motives and the administrative capacity in respect to alignment between the legal regulations and institutional motives (Commons, 2024; Lescrauwaet et al., 2022). Sustainability commitments can be more symbolic in the context of over centralization of governance bodies, or ones that are vaguely applied.

The economic efficiency and legal responsibility may particularly be relevant in environment of sustainable management in education. The legal systems outline the degree of the economic decisions undertaken, but the capability of an institution to respond to the regulatory and sustainability demands is determined by the economic performance. The failure to fit well between these dimensions can result in under-funded legal fronts or even maladaptive regulation enforcement and limited sustainability results. The rise of analogies has also been documented within the framework of environmental governance where the effectiveness of sustainability practices is defined by financial resources and consistent institutional arrangements (Lemos, 2024; Peng and Pivato, 2019).

The findings underscore the need to have mixed governance structures that find the right balance between financial sustainability, legal responsibility and institutional autonomy. Sustainable management practices in the education sector can be best achieved by implementation of economic policies having rational legal framework and vibrant governance policies. This contribution is important in interdisciplinary study of sustainability because it offers an empirical description of the interface between economic and legal considerations, and offers policy-specific implications on how to improve the education systems in an attempt to achieve the long-term sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The economic capacity, legal system and the governing systems are gradually developing a powerhouse control towards the implementation of the sustainable management practice in the education sector. The paper touched on these dimensions by comparing the two aspects of secondary data by discovering that education systems that are disposed of higher level of government investment, higher legal obligation and decentralized forms of governance have more positive sustainability outcomes. The findings have shown that the fiscal sustainability is a critical element of institutional strength and enables educational establishments to maintain their quality, expand access, and respond to societal demands in an effective way. At the same time, legal schemes particularly constitutional recognition of right to education and sustainability-driven policies are important towards maintaining accountability, permanence of policies and equitable provision. The paper however, also points out that without positive policies concerning

governance, legal recognition is unlikely to succeed in its endeavors. A combination of economic and legal perspectives makes this research a part of the interdisciplinary knowledge on the topic of sustainability in education and underline the importance of the stable structures of governance that would be the mediating factor between the two notions of financial efficiency and legal accountability. Although the research has flaws (it relies on secondary data and descriptive research), the

research is worthwhile information to policy makers and individuals in the institutions that are interested in improving sustainability-based management in the education systems. More research that is longitudinal and institution-based would also assist in establishing the causal relationships between economic investment, legal governance, and sustainable educational outcomes

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