

## ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION - PREREQUISITE FOR SUCCESS OF EDUCATION OBJECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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**Abstract:** Education goals for sustainable development Goals 4 by 2030 (SDG4) approved by the United Nations have been included in the Action Plan of Vietnam's Education Sector. The implementation of these goals poses enormous challenges in Vietnam and in other countries. Monitoring and assessment before, during and after the completion stages of the implementation of SDG4 play a particularly important role to timely adjust and to revise toward the SDG4 and quality assurance. The article addresses needs of achieving the objectives of SDG4 and dealing with the challenges posed during the implementation process, and emphasizing the role of educational assessment in ensuring the success of education sustainable development until 2030.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, SDG4, education assessment, quality assurance for SDG4.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2015 United Nations report reviewed six objectives of Education for All (EFA) programme initiated in Jomtien, Thailand and confirmed in Dakar commitment in 2000 and in the Millennium Development Goals approved by 189 countries in 2000. The report shows that a considerable number of these objectives remain unachieved [1; 22].

For the general development, the United Nations (the UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with seventeen goals in September 2015. One of these goals is to ensure inclusive education, education quality and equality and life long learning opportunities for everyone (1, page 20). Education for sustainable development is the fourth goal abbreviated as SDG4 of the seventeen goals by 2030. As a member of the UN, Vietnam has actively joined the discussion and development of these goals. On 10 May 2017, Vietnam Prime Minister signed Decision 622/QĐ-TTg to release the National Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda goals for Sustainable Development. Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs are thereby authorized to implement SDG4 goals. Acting on this mission, Ministry of Education released its 'Action plan for sustainable development in the field of education and training by 2025 and its orientations by 2030'.

The action plan will be launched in the durations of 2017-2020, 2020-2025 with its 2030 vision. For the objectives in the action plan to be achieved successfully, it is vitally important that supervision and assessment have been conducted frequently during the implementation so that recommendations and revisions can be made

timely and the activities of the plan are conducted accordingly in terms of progress and quality.

### 2. CONTENT

#### 2.1. Sustainable Development Goals 4

SDG4 goals are to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. These overall goals are detailed with their subsidiary goals targeting at education and training at all levels, learners and teachers. Specific details are as follows:

- Goal 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary education to achieve the learning outcomes.

- Goal 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to qualified early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

- Goal 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and qualified technical, vocational and tertiary education.

- Goal 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.

- Goal 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, indigenous peoples and vulnerable children at different training levels.

- Goal 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy knowledge.

- Goal 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, 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.

In addition to seven key goals, 3 means of implementation are recommended as follows:

- Objective 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities for children, disable people, and people with gender issues, and provide learning environment which is safe, no violence inclusive and effective for all.

- Objective 4.b: By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, especially in undeveloped countries, small developing islands in African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes in developed countries and other developing countries

- Objective 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 developing island.

In essence, SDG4 goals provide continuity to 'Education For All' goals and Millennium Development goals to ensure everyone (regardless of their gender, age, ethnic group, language, race, religion, political ideology, source of origin, physical features, socioeconomic status, and other factual sources) have equitable access to inclusive education, education quality and equality and life long learning opportunities.

Before being approved by the United Nations, SDG4 goals were agreed at the World Education Forum held in Incheon, South Korea with more than 1,600 representatives from 160 countries and the United Nations and the World Bank, including 120 ministers and leaders of organizations and associations. With the approval for the SDG4 goals, a framework for action and a set of 43 criteria including 11 global criteria and 32 specific criteria, criteria 16.1 and 16.2 as subsidiary goals for the sixteenth goal were developed to evaluate the implementation of SDG4. The SDG4 goals were approved at the end of the year 2015, which is a starting point to evaluate the actual state of the action framework from 2016 onwards. The framework for action and the action plan aimed at education for sustainable

development are developed by countries on the basis of these criteria.

Section 4 in the 2015 Incheon declaration states that SDG4 goals are the core of 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the key elements for other goals to be achieved. In other words, the achievement of SDG4 goals are set as the prerequisite for realizing other SDGs goals by 2030.

## 2.2. Challenges to the implementation of SDG4

A large number of 'Education For All' goals and Millennium Development goals failed to be achieved by 2015. Therefore, for the SDG4 goals to be implemented, it is necessary to evaluate the actual situation especially difficulties and challenges to adopt specific solutions for each stage of implementation by 2030. A report by Anna Cristina and a number of other experts attending the third conference on Education by 2030 in the Asia-Pacific region held in Thailand in July 2017 (with 200 representatives in the region) shows that there remain some key challenges to the implementation of SDG4 in a large number of countries as follows.

- Currently there are about 263 million of children, adolescents and youth unable to attend school, 43% of the youth in the countries with high average income and 38% of the same group in those with low average income are able to finish secondary education; the corresponding rates in the low income and high income countries are 14% and 84%. General education especially at lower and upper secondary education level is not offered free of charge in a large number of countries. The out-of-school rate is high, especially that of female students at these two education levels.

- 67% of five-year-old children can attend pre-primary education before they start primary school and this one-year pre-primary education programme is offered for free in only 36 countries (2014).

- Data collected in 76 countries show that 20% of the youth with the age range from 25 to 29 in the richest countries and 1% of the poorest countries are able to finish a four-year post secondary education programme. Data in 2014 show that the raw enrollment rate of students into post secondary education is 34%. In addition, a large of number of those students finishing vocational training colleges and university fail to work in the job they are trained to and the unemployment rate remains high.

- Youths are not well-prepared in terms of their job skills for their future job after vocational training. For example, one of the key skill areas is ICT-related but a study shows that only 65% of the youth in European

countries can send emails with attachments and 44% can use simple mathematic calculations. According to another study, students of grade eight in the Czech Republic who consider using the computer as a tool to search for knowledge account for 85%. The respective rates in Thailand and Turkey are 13% and 9%. These facts show that the youth currently lack basic job skills to meet work requirements, especially in the stage when the industry revolution 4.0 has commenced and ICT-related skills are essential ones required by the labour market.

- In 2014, 64% of the world's nations achieved gender equality in primary education, 46% in lower secondary education and 23% in upper secondary education. From 2008 to 2014, there were 7 out of 100 youths from the poorest countries who can finish upper secondary education. This fact shows that inequality in education opportunities exists in countries and regions of different levels of economic development.

- 40% of learners are not taught in their native language. The percentage of the people with disabilities who receive formal schooling and their years of schooling are much lower than the general rate. These are the figures to measure inequality in ensuring quality education opportunities for all learners in a large number of countries.

- In the period from 2005 to 2014, 758 million of adults were illiterate. In the period from 2004 to 2011, only 6% of adults in 29 poor countries ever attended a learning programme and 15% of adults did not have basic literate skills. In other words, the illiteracy percentage in poor countries remain tremendously high.

- The education programmes and coursebooks in a large number of countries have not covered the contents meant to implement SDG4. Issues of global citizen-oriented education, climate change, natural disaster prevention are not prioritized in many countries.

- Numerous countries do not allocate funding for providing scholarships to disadvantaged pupils and students for them to attend school.

- No global index has been set yet, but countries have made commitments to allocate at least 4% of their GDP and/or 15% of their spending on education. However, at least 35% countries have spent less than what they have committed themselves to. In general, the fundings raised do not meet the requirements to implement SDG4 goals. It is stated in Incheon declaration (South Korea) that "corruption and inefficiency use of funds remain problematic in many countries."

- Education in many countries is governed by two or more than two ministries rather than one ministry. This

practice affects the coordination and management of the SDG4 goals by 2030.

## **2.3. The role of assessment in ensuring SDG4 quality**

### **2.3.1. The role of education assessment**

Education assessment is the process of collecting data systematically on education in order to propose recommendations, conclusions, and proposals to improve the education quality effectively, thus to meet the predetermined education objectives. Education assessment is indispensable in education and education assessment is conducted in three forms: diagnostic assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment.

- Diagnostic assessment is made prior to the implementation of an education plan and education activities in order to collect factual information of education input factors and the other factors that may potentially affect the implementation of the predetermined targets. Collecting factual information helps assessors find out areas of strength and weakness in an objective manner. Therefore, data of validity and reliability play an important role in working out solutions, techniques, and policies, etc. to implement education activities to achieve education objectives.

- Formative assessment is conducted during the education process. This type of assessment is aimed at supervising the whole process of implementing approved plans, providing assessment on whether the formulation of the plans prior to implementation is appropriate or not, how the affective factors may have impact on the implementation of the plan objectives on timely basis, and offering recommendations to address both areas of strength and weakness to meet education objectives.

- Summative assessment is the type of assessment conducted after a stage of a plan or an education activity has finished. This type of assessment is aimed at developing output after the completion of the stage or the activity and assessing the effect of the output on education outcomes. The data collected in summative assessment after the stage or the activity can be used, in many cases, for the diagnostic assessment in the next plan or education stage, depending on the situation and contents.

In general, education assessment plays an important role in collecting data about the current teaching and learning situation so it can serve as a foundation to develop education plans, in supervising the implementation of the plan, in providing data to make proposals and recommendations on timely basis for the adjustment, revision of contents, methods, manner of

organizing education plans if necessary, in assessing the impact of education activities and their effectiveness in comparison with the previously set education objectives. Data, conclusions, recommendations gained from the process of education assessment can be used for the education sector to raise awareness about their strengths and shortcomings in conducting a education plan or activity, to adopt appropriate policies, to achieve the education objectives set by the society, to be used as proof in reports sent to authorized agencies and the society about the introduction and implementation of the education objectives, to publicize the education objectives to gain approval by the society on these activities, to serve as a source of information for domestic and international organizations and individual to use for various purposes such as research, citation and others.

### 2.3.2. Using education assessment to ensure education quality for SDG4

SDG goals including SDG4 goals have been approved by the Prime Minister. This is an important mission which is of great challenge so it requires the joined and united efforts of everyone from different social classes. For the SDG4 goals to be achieved, a set of actions has to be taken as follows: to establish a steering committee to implement SDG4 goals, to develop an action plan on the procedure of realizing SDG4 goals, to mobilize resources to realize SDG4 goals, to supervise and evaluate the implementation of SDG4, to publicize the action plan of SDG4 and its necessity.

Of all the set of measures taken, the supervision and evaluation normally receive limited attention and emphasis, which is commonplace in implementing social activities in some countries including Vietnam. This is a proven fact that most education activities are directed toward output statistics such as the schooling rate, completion rate of students, rate of qualified teachers, ratio of students to teachers. These statistics result from quantitative reports rather than qualitative one and do not focus the effectiveness and its impact on learners and the society. In other words, the statistic could be high records but it cannot guarantee that the education sector is achieving sustainable development.

SDG4 goals have been approved by the Vietnamese government. The framework of action in the education sector to realize the SDG4 has been developed. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a detailed plan for each stage and for each year from now to 2030 to ensure quality for the implementation of these goals. Apart from developing a detailed plan, it is also vital to establish a set of assessment criteria to assess how each goal is achieved in the timeline. The criteria will place emphasis

on the quantity, quality, progress, effectiveness and impact of education activities on learners and teachers, the education sector and the community and society. The set of criteria will serve as a basis for the supervision and assessment, self supervision and assessment of the whole process and the outcome of implementing education activities oriented toward SDG4 goals.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In each specific stage and activity of education, it is necessary to select the right method, tool and time to conduct appropriate assessment on the basis of the assessment criteria. In the current situation, both internal assessment (by the implementing education organization itself) and external assessment (by authorized education management bodies in the short term, and by an independent organization or international agency in the long term) can be conducted. If the supervision and assessment based on the set criteria are conducted in timely, objective and transparent manner, this should help ensure quality of education activities aimed at implementing SDG4 goals.

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