

## **On the Enabling and Reproductive Role of Education: A Critical Analysis of UN Sustainable Goal on Education**

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### **Abstract**

Educational institutions can shape individual thoughts, values, and ideals that last a lifetime. States have historically administered significant control over citizens through educational institutions. However, the evolution of critical discourses and globalization has necessitated education policies that shape the ideas, behaviors, and values of people in order to prepare them as global citizens. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on education aims to impart global values through quality education. This article critiques the targets and outcomes under this goal using Althusser's theory of education. It explores contradictions within the SDG educational targets, which simultaneously advocate for empowering human beings by enhancing practical skills and cognitive abilities and consolidate the reproductive role of education in neoliberal, capitalist societies.

**Keywords:** global education, SDG four, UN SDG, citizenship education, education policies

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## **Introduction**

Education for citizenship can be traced back to ancient Sparta and Athens; the Graeco-Roman patterns of civic education left lasting influences for subsequent centuries on education policies (Heater 2003, 1-25). In modern nation-states, the goal of citizenship education is generally similar, which is preparing young people as responsible citizens. It educates young people on how to be a part of society, community, and nation (Ljunggren 2014). Citizenship education is invariably associated with the national identity and socio-political environment of a country (Smith 2003). The promotion of national values is integrated to varying degrees into the education policies of modern states. France, for example, since the late nineteenth century, has instrumentalized education to prepare young people as ideal citizens, i.e., “good republicans,” and to consolidate national culture based on the principles of freedom, equality, solidarity, and human rights (Osler and Sturkey 2001, 290). Again, few countries, such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore, have detailed references in their education policies to impart national values, while others have minimal and vague references, e.g., Canada, England, USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Spain (Le Métais, 1997). In short, education has long been a medium for instilling and enhancing national consciousness among citizens.

However, the evolution of diverse critical discourses, such as feminism, queerism, and transnationalism, have transformed the traditional conceptions of agency, civic identity, and membership bound by a national border (Abowitz and Harnish 2006). Moreover, political, cultural, and economic globalization has brought the world closer. The evolution of multilateral international organizations and a more interconnected global market economy have undermined the nation-states (Porter & Vidovich 2000; Torres 2002). Expansion of investment, industry, information technology, and individual consumers have allowed economic activities to transcend borders and diminished the influence of states (Ohmae 1995). As a result, national citizenship concepts have been transforming worldwide. In Europe,

for example, increasing political and economic integration has prompted different countries to include concepts of supranational and European citizenship to varied extents in their education curricula (Philippou, Keating, and Hinderliter Ortloff 2009). The term *global* also bears negative connotations; many people across the globe often synonymize it with the exportation of Western ideals. Globalization can also be viewed as a *regime of truth*<sup>1</sup> that positions itself as a neutral and objective reality, and “valorizes the economic rationality of neoclassical economics and the minimalist politics of neoliberalism” (Dudley 1998, 29-30). Nevertheless, in the age of high-speed communication and transportation, globalization is an actual phenomenon that has pushed the boundaries of national citizenship. The changing dimensions brought forward by globalization and critical discourses, thus, require an education system that nurtures *global* values and prepares global citizens. The Sustainable Development Goal on education by the United Nations (UN) reflects this attempt to cultivate global citizens through education.

Education can be a paradoxical institution. For example, it can help to alleviate poverty and, at the same time, be a human capital investment method. In the context of international development, paradoxes of education magnify because it can simultaneously contribute to promoting peace and democracy as well as deepen inequalities, colonial legacies, and Westernized neoliberal values (Harber 2014). Bengtsson et. al (2018) explored these contradictions by examining the intrinsic and instrumental value of education in the context of sustainable development agenda. The authors argued that “pursuing the development of education for its intrinsic value is strengthened rather than undermined if we take seriously the wide

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<sup>1</sup> *Regime of truth* is a Foucauldian concept, where truth is an ensemble of rules, and “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements” and is linked with “systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it” (Foucault 1984, 74).

range of instrumental benefits that follow from improved education and how they seem to arise” (2). In the SDG four, there exists a “tension between the economic human capital theory that underpins the World Bank’s view of how education can contribute to sustainable development and the more expansive, rights-based view developed over the years by UNESCO” (Tikly 2017, 52). Moreover, the indicators to assess inclusion, equality, and quality of education are also inadequate to measure the values of the targets (Unterhalter 2019). This study contributes to this critical discussion by analyzing the Sustainable Development Goal on education using Althusser’s *theory on education*. It explores the internal contradictions within SDG four as it simultaneously advocates enhancing human capabilities and reinforces reproductive functions of education. Understanding these contradictions can also help recognize the strength and weaknesses of education targets, predict the viabilities of the indicators, and overcome challenges in real-life implementation. This article first introduces the UN sustainable development goal on education, followed by a detailed discussion on how this goal promotes the reproductive role of education and neoliberal ideologies.

### **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for Quality Education**

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are expected to be a blueprint for promoting peace and progress worldwide. The fourth SDG targets ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations). In the Appendix, Table 01 provides a detailed list of the ten targets and eleven indicators under this goal. These targets aim for adult literacy and numeracy skills, access to quality pre-primary education, free primary and secondary education for all, access to vocational and tertiary levels of education, and elimination of all disparities in education. It also targets expanding education for sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights, and appreciation for cultural diversity. Moreover, this goal aims to equip young adults with technical and

vocational skills to pursue jobs, employment, and entrepreneurship. SDG four on education also emphasizes developing a safe and inclusive learning environment in schools, increasing the number of higher education scholarships for developing countries, and increasing the number of qualified teachers in developing countries. In short, this goal underscores the importance of access to education as well as quality, inclusion, and equity in education. All the 17 goals under SDG are interconnected; however, the fourth goal in education is unique because it aims to prepare citizens with knowledge and capabilities to promote SDG goals. In 2019, a UN General Assembly resolution recognized quality education as a fundamental enabler to achieving all other SDGs. In other words, education is not only a goal but also a means to achieve SDG. Subsequently, a framework- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for 2030- was developed for implementing policies to achieve educational goals in the UN member states. The ESD for 2030 framework specifically advocates for integrating sustainability principles in national education policies and curricula “as a means to empower individuals to take informed decisions” (UNESCO 2019, Annex II page 3).

Table 2: GCED Learning Outcomes and Topics	
Core Learning Outcomes	Topics
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners acquire knowledge and understanding of local, national, and global issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations</li> <li>• Learners develop skills for critical thinking an analysis</li> </ul>
Socio-Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners experience a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, based on human rights</li> <li>• Learners develop attitudes of empathy, solidarity, and respect for differences and diversity</li> </ul>
Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners act effectively and responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world</li> <li>• Learners develop motivation and willingness to take necessary actions</li> </ul>

The ESD for 2030 framework combines a threefold approach comprising individual transformation, societal transformation, and technological advances to achieve the SDGs. These approaches are designed to shape cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral tendencies through education. Again, these three outcomes are also the core conceptual dimensions of Global Citizenship Education (GCED). GCED is one of the ways to achieve the goals of quality education. According to UNESCO's (2015) GCED pedagogical framework, global citizenship is defined as "a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity" with an emphasis on "political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global" (14). Table 2 includes the core learning outcomes and topics of GCED framework.

UNESCO's global citizenship education is a lifelong learning process. From early childhood education to all subsequent levels of education, this framework emphasizes formal and informal education; and curricular and extracurricular educational interventions (UNESCO 2015, 15). The goal of GCED is to cultivate the following learning attributes: a) informed and critically literate, b) socially connected and respectful of diversity, and c) ethically responsible and engaged (UNESCO 2015, 23). The GCED framework also includes comprehensive learning objectives and age-specific topics that can be adapted according to the local context. The UN considers the ESD for 2030 and GCED as mutually reinforcing approaches to achieve SDG four on education.

The ESD for 2030 and GCED frameworks are ambitious, broad, and comprehensive in their scope. They are conscious of contemporary global challenges like climate change, environmental sustainability, misuse of technology, and others. Undoubtedly, tackling these global challenges requires citizens with qualities like critical thinking ability, compassion, and empathy, which move far beyond literacy and numeracy skills. Global citizenship education, in general, seeks to bring peace and prosperity by promoting global consciousness

(ethical orientations) and global competencies (economic skills) (Dill 2013). The ESD for 2030 and GCED aspire to accomplish educational outcomes through individual transformation, societal transformation, and technological advances. However, contradictions exist within the outcomes and targets of both frameworks that might impact the success and feasibility of these goals in real life. These frameworks want to enhance the capabilities of individuals while simultaneously reinforcing the capitalistic socio-economic structure and neoliberal ideologies. The next section of this article will explore these internal ambiguities within the fourth SDG by analyzing the different targets and approaches outlined by the ESD for 2030 and the GCED framework.

### **Reproductive Role of Education and the Fourth Sustainable Development Goal**

In the “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser (1971) introduced a critical concept for understanding the role of education and educational institutions in modern capitalistic societies. He labeled educational institutions as the dominant ideological state apparatus (ISA) since it plays a significant role in reproducing capitalistic relations of production in a country. The Althusserian concept of the reproductive role of schools and other educational institutions operates in two ways, a) imparting the *know-how* methods, e.g., language, literature, science, mathematics, natural history, and b) ideologies of the state and the ruling class, e.g., moralism, civics, ethics, professionalism (155). While discussing these reproductive functions of educational institutions as an ISA, Althusser (1971) created powerful imagery when he wrote:

Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected ‘into production’: these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and



middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle executives, petty bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer,' the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen') (155).

In other words, educational institutions consistently reproduce the agents of exploitation, agents of repression, and professional ideologists who can maintain, nurture, and sustain this endless cycle of reproduction and exploitation in society for ages. The *reproductive model of education* primarily has three dimensions- the economic-reproductive model, cultural-reproductive model, and hegemonic-state reproductive model (Giroux 1983, 261). Analyzing the targets and outcomes under the ESD for 2030 and GCED frameworks from the perspective of these models highlights the inherent reproductive elements in the fourth SDG.

The UN SDGs have specific targets to develop the competencies of citizens worldwide. For example, SDG 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.6 focus on expanding literacy and numeracy skills and participation in organized learning, expanding from preschool education to primary, secondary, upper-secondary, and tertiary-level educational institutions. It also emphasizes increasing opportunities for all to participate in technical, vocational, and any other formal or non-formal mode of education. SDG 4.4 specifically targets equipping youth and adults with technical and vocational skills to increase employability and economic competencies. From the viewpoint of an economic-reproductive model of education, these targets endorse the reproduction of skills and the reproduction of the relations of production. Today educational institutions have become a site of production (Sotiris 2013). Both factories and educational institutions of modern times are similar as they produce *means of production*.

Education policies and institutional management of educational institutions, particularly at tertiary level institutions, are increasingly shaped by the demand of the capitalist market, which is the generation of new scientific and technological knowledge to control the capital accumulation and the ability to produce qualified personnel to manage capital. These educational institutions help maintain capitalistic modes and relations of production by extending knowledge and skills, and by promoting “identities, habits and illusions of a particular kind of worker within neoliberal capitalism” (Sotiris 2013, 136). Again, the indicators to measure the success of the 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.6 SDG targets focus on the participation, enrollment, and completion rate. With these indicators, the broad vision of quality education has eventually been narrowed down to student assessment scores in reading and mathematics (Smith 2019). Evaluating such ambitious goals on a global scale is definitely complicated. So, it requires a simplified and quantifiable measurement scale that can be adopted and followed universally. But the overt reliance on statistical data to evaluate the success of quality education can be problematic. UNESCO recognizes these challenges as well. Apart from different reporting practices, countries apply different definition and criteria for literacy or even changes evaluation criteria from census to census (UNESCO 2009). Therefore, the ability of these goals to bring substantial changes in the quality of educational systems is debatable. Instead, the SDG targets will help refine the neoliberal capitalist ideals within educational policies worldwide and reaffirm the economic-reproductive role of education.

One of the uniqueness of the ESD for 2030 framework is the emphasis on learners’ individual transformation process as an approach in education. Education facilitates a transformation process through which an individual becomes conscious of surrounding realities and can also make an empathetic connection to the complexities of realities (UNESCO 2015, Annex II page 4). It also emphasizes the importance of transformation in individuals since it leads to the discovery of values and causes that concern both

individuals and the community. As a result, individuals can find “other fellow members and bond with them, which generates solidarity and facilitates collective action for transformation and a culture of sustainability” (UNESCO 2015, Annex II page 4). This transformative approach to education makes it a medium for achieving human emancipation, which Marx (1843) envisaged as a condition where an individual finds unity and connection among their labor, individual and communal lives. Again, this transformation in individuals also requires courage, determination, and critical thinking abilities. Therefore, both ESD for 2030 and GCED advocate developing critical thinking skills among citizens. While the emphasis on critical inquiry and analysis skills in the educational system is remarkable, it also reinforces an economic perspective on education that focuses on producing skilled labor based on the market demands. The world now has become more complex than ever. Economic activities require a complicated array of skills and knowledge. As such, the modern economic model assumes that “if people are educated to think more analytically rather than through a pedagogy of drills on skills and if, at the same time, people learn how to work on problem-solving more collaboratively (teamwork), then education will fulfill its role” (Torres 2002, 375).

Again, one of the targets of education goal is to focus on bringing structural changes to address the existing relationship between economic growth and sustainable development (UNESCO 2015, Annex I page 2). Thus, it aims to use education to develop values that can change the unsustainable consumer choices and production patterns in world economies (UNESCO 2015, Annex II page 5). In addition, ESD for 2030 also wants to bring forward structural changes through education by equipping people with relevant life skills to confront and overcome extreme poverty (UNESCO 2015, Annex II page 6). It also wants to inculcate values through education that can alter behaviors in favor of energy-saving and green technology (UNESCO 2015, Annex II page 6). While these targets are relevant in the context of contemporary global challenges, using education to instill values and dispositions for a specific type of socio-economic

structure affirms the role of educational institutions as ideological state apparatus. Thus, even when the education goals under SDG encourage enhancing human capabilities, it simultaneously promotes the reproduction of the labor force (human capital) and ideologies that eventually consolidates the capitalist economic model in society. However, from the viewpoint of the cultural-reproductive model, these targets offer an intriguing picture.

The cultural-reproductive model shows how an educational curriculum can create high-status and low-status knowledge by designing courses around theoretical and practical subjects (Giroux 1983, 268). For example, subjects like art, history, and science can be included in the so-called 'high status' category of knowledge, whereas 'low status' knowledge can include construction, automobile and electric repair, welding, and such. The 'low status' knowledge group of subjects requires more manual labor and less intellectual effort as opposed to the 'high status' knowledge subjects. Thus, from the cultural-reproductive model viewpoint, an educational curriculum can reinforce the division of labor and social hierarchy. The targets under the fourth SDG emphasize both literacy and numeracy skills as well as technical and vocational training. On the one hand, they are prioritizing literacy and numeracy with a presumption that it is an essential skill that must be acquired by everyone worldwide. The meanings and scope of literacy skills are highly disputed. The conceptualization and measurement process of functional literacy should also consider if people can "achieve the literacy functioning that they (or the society they live in) value" (Maddox and Esposito 2011). Again, incorporating technical and vocational education has justifiably elevated the importance of skills that need manual labor.

In short, the fourth SDG can continue the problematic presumptions about literacy while simultaneously reframe the importance of practical subjects. From a cultural-reproduction model perspective, these educational goals can paradoxically both reproduce and reduce norms and values that deepen social classes through education. Again, since the UN is a highly state-centric institution, the

SDG has designated the state as the principal-agent for implementing these goals. The hegemonic-state reproductive model investigates how the state uses educational institutions to influence the development of knowledge, legitimize political ideas, and further the economic interests of the dominant class (Giroux 1983, 279-281). In the GCED framework, UNESCO (2015) listed few countries- such as Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines- that integrated GCED core concepts and outcomes in their national education policies and curricula (47). As such, the education goals under SDG reaffirm the primacy of the state and further reinforce state hegemony. The ESD for 2030 also advocates monitoring behavioral patterns and values among youth to identify the best ways to utilize their strengths in promoting sustainable lifestyles (UNESCO 2019, Annex II 09). While such monitoring could be reasoned for the greater good of society, it could also inadvertently lead to more surveillance of individual behaviors by the state, and even by the technological corporations. Thus, it is evident from this discussion that despite few strengths, the SDG targets could neither escape empowering the reproductive role of the educational institution nor the promotion of state hegemony and neoliberal ideals.

### **Expansion of Neoliberal Ideologies and the Sustainable Goal on Education**

The educational goal under SDG has emerged as the citizenship discourse has changed due to globalization. Therefore, elements of neoliberal globalization inhere within the processes and expected outcome of education goals and frameworks under SDG. The current global discourse of education and development is inundated with Western ideas of progress and justice, rationalized with a “conference-declaration framework-national plan cycle” and implemented by the networks of development professionals and international organizations (Chabbott 2003, 10). In other words, by sponsoring international conferences and non-binding declarations and frameworks for actions, a set of standards for progress, per the dominant discourse, is established. Eventually, national policy designs

attempt to reproduce those standards in respective countries. SDG four has emerged through this rationalization process of Western ideals dominating the global discourse. For example, SDG 4.7 targets mainstreaming education about sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles in educational policies, curricula, and all levels of educational institutions. It also emphasizes learning to acquire skills and knowledge on the following topics: global citizenship, gender equality, human rights, peace and non-violence, and cultural diversity. Similarly, the GCED framework aims to prepare ethically responsible and engaged citizens. Since educational institutions also function as a platform for socialization; so, it is a suitable place for cultivating values and norms that shape social life. Therefore, it is also important to understand the pedagogical roots of the norms, values, and lifestyles imparted through education. In this case, the discussion in the previous section demonstrated that the SDG targets invariably promote a dominant role for the state and reproduction of capitalist relations of production. These are few of the prominent characteristics of neoliberalism, which has dominated the world in the last few decades. Neoliberalism embraces the primacy of the state in preparing rational consumers, economically self-interested and entrepreneurial individuals as well as in creating “the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws, and institutions necessary for its operation” (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315).

Moreover, the prevailing socio-economic norms already “place greater value on education arising through the existing physical, political and legal infrastructures” (Lane 2016, 46). The reliance on quantitative indicators and assessment scores to measure the success of education goals strengthens this dominance of formal educational institutions as the site of knowledge generation and dissemination. In other words, it reinforces the role of the educational institution as the most dominant ideological apparatus in society. The targets under the SDG on education emphasize equipping individuals with technical skills. Target 4.b especially calls for increasing opportunities for people in the developing countries to participate in information and

communication technology, technical, engineering, and scientific programs in developed countries. Implicit in these provisions is an acknowledgment of knowledge economy and knowledge capitalism. In the modern world, knowledge is the most critical form of capital that underpins neoliberalism of the twenty first century (Olssen and Peters 2005, 330). As such, the transfer of knowledge from developed to developing world can help reduce inequalities, but at the same time, it indirectly endorses neoliberal ideals of knowledge economy and capitalism. Again, the concept of critical thinking ability, on which SDG 4 has an overt focus, also derives from Enlightenment and Western philosophical trajectories. Enlightenment encourages developing an attitude that can problematize “man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject” (Foucault 1984, 42). Essentially, this is the educational goal of critical thinking that involves a systemic analysis of facts, information, and observations available in reality.

The pedagogical roots of critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates to later Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, from Francis Bacon, Descartes, Montesquieu, and Voltaire to William Graham Sumner and John Dewey in the twentieth century (Paul, Elder, and Bartell 1997). Moreover, the underlying foundation of morality, ethics, human rights, democracy, and other concepts with the SDG target is deeply embedded in Western neoliberal ideologies. These values are the outcomes of Western Enlightenment, which is the “de facto operative world culture” according to the world society scholars (Chabbot 2003, 7). Whether these values represent global morality is debatable. However, the global citizenship education indirectly attempts to prepare students with “secular, liberal, consumer-oriented cosmopolitan subjects” (Dill 2012, 541). Undoubtedly, ensuring equal opportunities for education worldwide is vital. The problematic issue is the inherent bias toward certain types of ideals that are not universal in their essence. Besides, these targets also reflect efforts towards cultural globalization that “involves the paradoxical phenomenon that everyone’s traditional values and beliefs seem to be, on the one hand,

under threat from many different perspectives, and on the other hand, increasingly pushed toward similarity and homogeneity” (Porter & Vidovich, 2000, 451). Therefore, inherent assumptions of education policies at the global level require a closer inspection rather than only focusing on the problems with the implementation of the goals (McKenzie 2012, 162). The UN system itself is a result of neoliberal political order, which is why it is also unsurprising that neoliberal values are articulated within these education policy designs. Therefore, the underlying Western and neoliberal ideals of SDG four only help propagating the neoliberal ideologies globally, and consequently, consolidates the role of educational institutions as an ideological apparatus in the state and society.

### **Conclusion**

The sustainable development goal on education deserves credit for the efforts to promote an educational system that goes beyond the *banking model of education*<sup>2</sup>. It has underscored the importance of critical thinking abilities as essential skills for learners. It has brought a welcome discursive shift by moving from universal rights for accessing basic education to rights for a lifelong learning opportunity (Bengtsson et. al 2018, 3). The SDG four has also expanded the scope of education by integrating various processes of individual capabilities enhancement, from traditional economic competencies to critical thinking skills. The overarching vision of this educational goal is to enhance human capabilities and human potential. Analyzing these goals and targets from an Althusserian theory of education helps to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this policy. For example, Althusser (1971) explained how the ideologies of the ruling class manifest through norms, practices, and rituals. In schools, ideology physically manifests

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<sup>2</sup> Banking model of education is a concept by Paulo Freire, where students are passive actors absorbing information and ideas imparted by the teachers. Freire (1970) argued that this model of education reinforces oppression in societies.



in the architecture of school buildings, the separation of space of teachers, staff, and students to the arrangement of seating in classrooms (Giroux 1983, 264). The physical location and structure of educational institutions can obstruct access to education for minority groups and disabled people (Lane 2016). Goal 4.2a calls for ensuring appropriate facilities for all marginalized groups and a gender-inclusive, non-violent, and safe learning environment. Highlighting the importance of the environment and structural facilities in schools, the fourth SDG encourages participation of different minority groups in education. Again, by promoting critical thinking capabilities, citizens can become conscious of the ideologies and power dynamics of state and society and learn to question them. The fourth SDG also encourages greater appreciation for racial, cultural, and gender diversity. The education targets have, thus, the potential to promote a truly emancipatory education, because an emancipatory or liberatory education ideally should be “antisexist and antiracist and anticlassist” and “committed against the ubiquitous and parasitic action of power” (De Lissovoy 2010, 206). If successful, the education targets under SDG can even make people aware of the inherent limitations of this policy.

While quality education should be equally accessible to all across the globe, the educational goals also remain problematic as they propagate a specific set of neoliberal values. They also reinforce the capitalist socio-economic dynamics through an overt emphasis on acquiring skills for employment and entrepreneurship through education. Sustainable consumer behaviors as an outcome of education also endorse the neoliberal versions of modern capitalism. Again, the SDG targets have an unequivocal focus on promoting sustainability values through education. As a result, these targets indirectly promote some degree of homogeneity and uniformity across the globe. To reconcile the various socio-cultural diversities, the ESD for 2030 and GCED frameworks made room for local adaptations as required. However, localizations might also undercut the achievement and progress of the overarching objectives of the SDG. As a result, the

success of implementing these goals remains very unpredictable. Moreover, the SDG target-setting continues the “persistent historical pattern of focusing almost exclusively on the role of education as a means, specifically as a means towards achieving economic returns, rather than as an end in itself” (Bengtsson et. al 2018, 14). As a result, there are high possibilities that these goals, like many other educational and pedagogical reforms, might eventually strengthen capitalist socio-economic structures. The underlying neoliberal assumptions within these education goals especially deserve attention as they can shape national educational curricula and policies across the world, and eventually influence the cognitive development of billions of people. As such, neoliberal ideas could be globalized as an inescapable reality through its indomitable influence on the means of knowledge production. Therefore, a critique of the targets and outcomes of the fourth SDG is relevant and important to ensure that it brings meaningful change to billions of lives around the world.

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## Appendix

<b>Table 01</b>		
SDG 04: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all		
Serial	Target	Indicators
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	4.1.1: Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
		4.1.2: Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
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	4.2.1: Proportion of children aged 24–59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex
		4.2.2: Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university	4.3.1: Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex

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	4.4.1: Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
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 children in vulnerable situations	4.5.1: Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a	Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment



	culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	
4.a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all	4.a.1: Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service
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 enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries	4.b.1: Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study

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	4.c.1: Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level
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