Civic Education and Sustainable Development Goals: A Framework for Secondary Schools

Ramsha Rasheed
Assistant Controller of Examinations
Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan
ramsha.rasheed1716@gmail.com
Sadia Sarwar　(Corresponding Author)
BS Ed. (Hons) University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
sadiasarwar297@gmail.com
Shah Jahan Ashraf
Research Assistant Government College Women University Faisalabad
shahjahan_ashraf@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7837-6676

Abstract
This study investigates the nexus of civic education and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in secondary schools. The objective of the research is to establish a model for incorporating civic learning into secondary school curricula with the goal of raising awareness, promoting civic engagement, and generating action in the direction of the SDGs. Amid mounting global concerns about climate change, poverty, and inequality, it has become more imperative than ever to work toward an education that encourages students to engage in work that supports sustainable development. The paper presents a basic structure that explains the key parts of civic education (critical thinking, participatory learning, and social responsibility) in connection with the 17 UN SDGs. The framework, if implemented in schools, would help educators provide the student with a good level of understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The students will be inspired to make a difference in their vicinity and in their world. This framework seeks to address the link between education and action toward sustainability through a focus on global citizenship and ethical commitment. The article ends by giving ideas on how to include civic education in the curriculum, help teachers grow, and support policies so that civic education can be a key part of achieving the SDGs in high school education.
Keywords: Civic Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Secondary Schools, Global Citizenship, Curriculum Framework.

1. Introduction

In this global era of rapid change, the role of education in developing responsible, critical, and involved citizens is more pressing than ever. At the core of this transforming capacity is civic education, defined here as the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for all individuals to be informed and active participants in democratic processes and community life. Civic education enables young people to learn about and consider democratic principles such as governance, rights, responsibilities, and social justice, to be effective participants in their society, and to act in favor of democracy and the rule of law. Civic education is essential for secondary schools because pupils are at a key point in their cognitive and moral development, helping to cultivate the next generation of citizens who can respond to local and global challenges (Suyato & Hidayah, 2025).

Running alongside the increasing emphasis on civic responsibility is the global boost that has been given to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—the universal plan, endorsed by the United Nations in 2015, to tackle the world's most pressing problems through 2030. An interlinked set of 17 goals that respond to key globalization challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, quality education, and peace, the SDGs represent a call to action for all levels of society, including the education sector. These objectives highlight the need to prepare the next generation to effectively confront complex global challenges in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. As the global society is becoming more interconnected, the capacity for people, and especially for youths, to comprehend and react to those issues through informed editorial decisions is becoming crucial. The SDGs, thus, represent an important way to situate civic learning in a larger, global set of priorities (Damiani & Fraillon, 2025).

The integration of civic education curriculum with the footprints, values, and aims of the SDGs at the secondary school level is an emphatic synergy to the production of a morally guided and informed society. This connection enables students to value their roles in the community but see beyond and consider their role in the world. And when civic education is embedded with the SDGs, it becomes more than an academic exercise in the classroom but an action-based education that fosters critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and principled care. In the process, the students learn to connect what they're doing with current events around the world, and they become more invested in tackling problems like climate change, gender inequity and poverty that may not only be distant but also have consequences at home and on their own lives. Moreover this fusion could prompt an involvement of students in voluntary work with links to public policies and service-learning projects inspired largely by sustainable development (Chong & Cheng, 2025).

In the face of global challenges, Education cannot be limited to passive knowledge gain. Young people must be equipped to do more than understand the world. They must be equipped to change it for the better. Hence, the merging of civic education and the SDGs in secondary schools is not an optional pedagogical advantage but a must to develop the values of empathy, justice, and sustainability. It endeavors to ensure that they are empowered as active agents, able to act with purpose in a fast-changing and complex world, and in a way that gives them a continuity of identity and role and also addresses their responsibility towards creating an inclusive and sustainable world (Asghar & Bhatti, 2023).

This article presents a research case for teaching civics within the rubric of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in high schools towards the making of knowledgeable, engaged, and ethical global citizens. The paper aims to illuminate innovative practices for educational institutions to foster civic learning for youth social responsibility, environmental consciousness, and democratic engagement through integrating the synergies between civic learning and the SDGs. By combining these two approaches, education can indeed realize its transformative power and be the foundation for sustainable development and responsible membership of the global community (Agnieszka Jeziorski et al., 2025).

2. Civic Education and SDGs: Conceptual Framework

Civic education in the most general sense is the lifelong/continuous learning process of educating individuals (children, youth, and adults) about effective citizenry to make a difference in their communities and in their government. It is an academic discipline that studies how power, interests, and institutions shape the behaviour of individuals and groups in public, private, and civil society organisations. The aims of civic education are to develop critical reasoning, to provide knowledge of democratic values and structures of government, to

encourage participation in political and civil life, and to develop understanding of and respect for diversity, for the rule of law, and for human rights. Civic education in the secondary school system is key to preparing the responsible and active citizen (Kral, n.d.). Civic education helps young people acquire the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to understand and address the issues that face society and to participate in their communities in an informed, thoughtful, effective, and responsible manner.

Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, the 17 goals of the SDGs serve as a global agenda to tackle poverty, inequality, climate change, peace, and justice, among pressing issues, by 2030. For each goal, specific targets and indicators have been developed to create a roadmap for tracking progress and accountability. For instance, education for all and inclusive and equitable quality education are examples of targets under Goal 4 — Quality Education, and peaceful and inclusive societies are an example of a target under Goal 16 — Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Birachi, 2025). Dichotomously, to be funded for implementation in all countries, a global partnership is to foster service provision in all countries. The connection between the SDGs and civic education lies in their shared focus on values, equality, sustainability, justice, and participation, all of which are central to civic learning. Indeed, Target 4.7 of the SDGs specifically references the significance of education for sustainable development and global citizenship, rendering civic education a central means to advance the overall development agenda.

The ground shared by civic education and the SDGs is one of shared values and goals. Both promote maturity and responsible, educated citizens who will also be an asset in their communities and in world citizenry. Civic education is one such method of translating the abstract concepts of the SDGs into practical knowledge and behaviour for young people. Through civic learning, students gain knowledge about the realities of issues like climate change, gender inequality, and social injustice and skills to understand these issues more critically. In addition, civic education and the SDGs had in common the principles of being inclusive, of participation, and of empowerment for marginalised groups in particular. For example, projects in civic education that encourage youth participation in governance or environmental conservation will directly lead to SDG targets for participative governance and sustainable management of natural resources (Schulz et al., 2025).

In addition, civic education offers the moral and cognitive framework required by each person to comprehend and back the SDGs at home, in the country, and around the world." Through incorporating the goals into civics curricula, teachers can educate a generation of students who not only understand the nuances of sustainable development but also have the desire and knowledge to create change for the better. Doing so, schools become important places for fostering the 2030 Agenda's desired global citizens—individuals who will be informed, socially active, and committed to acting for sustainable futures. Therefore, the combination of civic education and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides a rich context for secondary education, aligning with the educational objectives of the 21st century and the universal aspirations for sustainable development, peace, and human dignity (Haris & Mufidah, 2025).

3. The Role of Civic Education in Achieving SDGs

Civic education is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it enables enlightened, responsible and proactive citizens who can contribute effectively to the development of their communities. One of the most basic contributions of civic education to the SDGs is fostering awareness and understanding of these global goals. The 17 SDGs, adopted by the United Nations, cover a range of issues such as poverty, inequality, climate degradation, peace and justice. But wishes and interests could only meaningfully shape how the public pursues these goals to the extent that each member of society was aware of their importance,

meaning, and the contribution they could make in these initiatives. Education for citizenship introduces students to concepts of sustainable development, human rights and social justice, which help them to understand the interrelationships between global challenges and the need for collaboration. Through schools, local programmes and public campaigns, civic education helps build a sense of global citizenship, encouraging people to become more informed about the SDGs and more aware of their roles as global citizens in advancing sustainable development (Velempini, 2025).

In addition to increasing knowledge, political knowledge also develops critical, constructive thinking and cooperative independence as important skills that nurture the ability to understand complex situations, interface between complex cases and proactively solve complex issues, some of which are interrelated SDG motivators. These are essential skills for identifying the underlying causes of social and environmental challenges, to assess feasible solutions, and to implement novel approaches locally and globally. Civic education—through promoting inquiry, critical thinking, and imagination—prepares students for wise judgement and responsible participation in society. And indeed, civic education also teaches and encourages dialogue and collaboration, how to work with others with whom we may disagree on certain matters but with whom we also share common understandings and sometimes the need to find common ground and/or to resolve conflict (Teshera-Levye et al., 2025). This type of collaboration is critical to advancing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that tackle societal issues and will only be achieved by building bridges between sectors, communities and countries. By being able to think critically about policies and know what is happening in the world and also know how to act in a democratic fashion, individuals will be in a better position to make demands and then ensure that policies and practices fall in line with considerations of sustainable development.

Similarly, the place of civic education in fostering an involved citizenry and enthusiastic community participation is just as crucial. The SDGs don't just belong to governments and organisations; they need the world's people and communities to act and engage. Civic education fosters civic duty to participate in local initiatives, volunteer activities and advocacy in favour of sustainable development goals. It enables people to come forward, express their opinions and demand answers from politicians and, as such, is all to the good for democratic governance and social harmony. Active citizens can support achieving the SDGs by prioritising other goals like education, better access to healthcare, the environment and gender equality, as well as reducing inequalities in their communities. Civic education helps citizens understand how their actions – such as someone's choice as a voter, contribution to public discussions, or a product of a community project – can influence actual results in terms of sustainable development. In addition, civic education is something that teaches empathy, the sense of the common good, and contributing to not even just the place around you but the world at large (Nwakoby & Iloka, 2025).

In summary, civic education is instrumental in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through providing knowledge and understanding of the SDGs, helping to develop key cognitive and social skills, and motivating active involvement in civic life, civic education helps enable people to act as agents of change and contribute to the achievement of the Goals, in their communities and in other sectors of society. This is crucial for the development of a sustainable civilisation, which is increasingly important as the world grapples with a mix of pressing global issues – rather than just clearly defined problems – that recognise no factors of stability or boundaries between them (Pareek & Pandey, 2025).

4. A Framework for Integrating Civic Education and SDG's in Secondary Schools

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Civic Education at Secondary Schools is a modality that can transform and prepare the youth to be responsible, knowledgeable and active world citizens. Amidst the growing tension in issues such as the climate, poverty, inequality and building peace, it is vital that school systems are better equipped to respond to the world's most pressing concerns. An effective structured harmonization of civic education with the SDGs: will require careful curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and assessment and evaluation practices. All are necessary for, and necessary elements of, the student knowledge and student capacities (skills, values, dispositions) necessary for sustainable living and responsible citizenship (Gillespie et al., 2025).

This framework results from the integration of curriculum development. By integrating SDGs with civic education, schools train students to have a comprehensive view of global issues and their interrelation with local problems. The curriculum should clearly reflect the connection between civic learning expectations and related SDG targets, including, for example, human rights, social justice, environmental sustainability and democratic governance. So, as students are studying civic responsibility and structure of government, they can also be delving into SDG 16, advocating for peace and justice and strong institutions. Interdisciplinary connections between subjects can promote this integration as well, bringing further support from geography, science, economics and history onto civic competences in relation to sustainable development. A dynamic curriculum should also be culturally and contextually relevant to the students, fostering inclusiveness and equity in both the content and delivery of instruction (Okada et al., 2025).

Student engagement and the chance for lifelong learning depend on how civic education and SDGs were taught, not just the curriculum's content. Traditional teaching methods fail to equip children with the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills necessary for the 21st century. Experiential and participatory tactics, such as project-based learning, service-learning, and community-based activities, are more effective alternatives. Project-based learning enables learners to explore real-life problems associated with the SDGs to yield workable solutions, linking theory and classroom practice. Service-Learning: Engage students in volunteer or social action projects, such as planting trees or recycling toilet paper, to help students develop empathy, a sense of civic responsibility, and a much better grasp of what the other half is feeling (Sichula et al., n.d.). Analogously, experiential learning such as simulations, site visits and role plays helps forge students as citizens and provides a meaning of the complexity of the world's challenges through their active engagement. These pedagogical approaches foster reflective thinking, civic agency, and lifelong dedication to bettering the human community.

Third, the rubric will also need strong assessment and evaluation components to gauge the efficacy of teaching and the degree to which students learn. A broad strategy encompassing traditional exams and tests is necessary to evaluate students' performance in civic education incorporating SDGs. Performance-based assessments (i.e., portfolios, class presentations, written reflective journals, and group discussions) can be used to gain a fuller understanding of what students know and are able to do, as well as how they think and work. Rubrics can also be developed to evaluate abilities in critical thinking, ethical reasoning, working in teams, and being community oriented. In-monitor formative assessment also helps teachers make decisions about instruction as well as provide feedback in a timely manner (Wagner & Galvez, 2025). Assessment should also include student and peer assessment in order to foster metacognition and responsibility. Furthermore, schools require indicators to access the long-term impacts of the

civic-SDG education on student behaviour and attitude, on local community engagement and on consciousness of global issues.

Lastly, there should be a comprehensive approach to the integration of Civic Education and SDGs into the secondary schools involving curriculum design, incremental pedagogy and multi-dimensional assessment. It can thus turn education into a powerful strategic force for developing active, engaged citizens that have the knowledge and skillset to engage critically and constructively in addressing global challenges to effectively work towards a sustainable and fair future. This approach enhances the quality of the learning environment and also promotes greater physical, emotional, and cognitive capacity in the next generation to pursue local, national, and global action that is rational and responsible (Miranda et al., 2025).

5. Implementation Strategies and Challenges

Mainstreaming Civic Education towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in secondary schools is an urgent strategic and multidimensional undertaking. One such approach is through in-service teacher training and professional development. Teachers are the most important intermediaries for the citizenship education that has been called for and now resonates with the concepts and aims of the SDGs (World We Want 2014), promoting, for example, global citizenship, environmental consciousness, social justice, and democratic participation. Yet, most educators do not have formal preparation in these cross-cutting and emerging domains (Toan & Huong, 2025). Effective implementation requires targeted capacity-building programmes that provide teachers with content knowledge of civic education as well as innovative pedagogical skills designed to fit participatory and learner-centred methods. Workshops, in-service, and continuous professional development opportunities are key to preparing teachers to meaningfully incorporate SDG issues into their teaching. Additionally, working with universities and colleges can also offer academic backing and curriculum development knowledge to teacher training programmes so that they are relevant and sustainable.

Resource mobilisation is also another fundamental factor in order for civic education on SDGs to be conducted effectively. Schools are often oppressed by lack of teaching resources, limited facilities and resources of information. Sound resource mobilisation tactics include partnering with government organisations, nongovernmental organisations, private sector firms, and development agencies. These partnerships offer a stream of funding, technology tools and educational resources that improve the learning environment (Sass et al., 2025). For example, projects in partnership with environmental non-profits can help students have real-world case studies and project-based learning on climate action, and projects with civic organisations can help students engage with local governance and community service. Infrastructure (in terms of classrooms, libraries, and well-structured digital learning facilities) is also a key element. Schools also require administrative backing to make sure that schools are making enough time for and giving proper emphasis to civic education within the larger school schedule. Resource mobilisation is not only money. It is also creating an enabling environment for innovation and community engagement.

However, in spite of these strategies, there remain several obstacles to the successful integration of civic education and the SDGs in secondary schools. One of the biggest obstacles is the curriculum restrictions. It's a case of — the curricula is actually cast in iron; it's so full, and there is so little choice to put certain kinds of subjects into it, civic education or themes about the SDGs. Where civic education does exist, it is frequently relegated to a side offering that lacks the depth and the integration across disciplines required to deeply engage. These limitations need to be addressed by advocating for a reformation of curricula where civic competencies and SDG principles are not treated as a solitary subject but are an integrated aspect across subjects.

Human and other resource constraints are an obstacle to implementation. Shortages of staff, learning materials, and up-to-date information are common in most schools, specifically in rural or underprivileged contexts. Innovative methods – peer-based learning, community outreach programmes, digital platforms – can help fill some of these gaps, but system-level support is crucial (Aasim, 2024).

Engagement of stakeholders is a second difficult hurdle to overcome. The successful integration of civic education for sustainable development depends on the active participation of students, teachers, school principals, parents and the community at large. Nevertheless, differences in the level of consciousness and commitment in the actors involved may impact the success of the programme. Some parents may not appreciate in the short term the importance of civic education, and policymakers may favor something that feels more directly related to the economy. To address this, schools need to give value to public engagement and to involve all parties in the decision making process (from planning to implementation as well as evaluation). A culture of it's everyone's responsibility and it's everyone's accountability could lead to the programmes being sustained over time. In conclusion, although a convergence of civic education and SDGs learning at the secondary level is promising, it will likely require dedicated effort and support as well as collective action to navigate the many barriers to reform (Eichberg & Charles, 2024).

6. Impact and Outcomes

The integration of civic education into curricula of secondary schools on the SDGs has had an impact on student learning, community participation, and broader educational policy. At student level, the most notable outcomes are increases in knowledge, secularised attitudes, and actions to step forward in favor of civic commitment and sustainable development. For instance, if students are offered a dedicated, comprehensive curriculum that combines civic education and inclusion of SDGs, this will help ensure that they have a good grasp of global challenges such as, climate change, poverty, inequality and peace. This knowledge produces more informed points of view and ethical values contributing to critical thinking and active citizenship. There are also shifts in attitude; students grow more empathetic, more open to diversity, and more willing to engage in problem-solving for the sake of their communities or some extension thereof. Behavioural results further substantiate the success of these interdisciplinary teaching plans. Students are more likely to engage in environmental stewardship, volunteer projects, and student-led advocacy campaigns focused on local symptoms of global issues (Thelma, 2024b).

Beyond the individual, community participation develops as a significant consequence of this kind of education. Many of these have provided examples and case studies from different contexts that illustrate the way in which secondary schools can become community-orientated and empower community members in the context of SDG-orientated citizenship education. For example, in schools where civic action projects are part of the curriculum, students have sponsored clean-up activities, gender equality information sessions and tree planting in cooperation with local authorities and civil society organisations (Rose & Sayed, 2024). These activities achieve more than academic compliance— they are real-world expressions of what is learnt at school and create the kind of school and community interaction that makes a difference. In both rural and urban environments, such collaborations frequently beget long-standing community development efforts that underscore the reality that schools are not isolated institutions but critical components of social ecologies. Parents, village officials, and local NGOs all tend to work alongside each other on these projects in a cycle in which a community's needs influence educational priorities and vice versa.

The findings at the policy level generated from the fusion between Civic Education and SDGs suggest the opportunities of having scalable models, applicable at national and sub-national levels. More and more education policy makers are realising that it makes a lot of sense to build SDG principles into the curriculums of schools so that we have a generation of young people who can hold down a job and be part of a more responsible global citizenry. Countries who have trialled these structures have found that community awareness of such initiatives has improved and that students are more engaged, leading to a desire to roll out the programmes further (Thelma, 2024a). There is also an implication that teachers require training, curricula be prescribed and tools for assessing outcomes broadened to ensure that not just academic outcomes, but also civic competencies and sustainability literacy, are assessed. In addition, scaling up these actions requires collaboration between education ministries, non-governmental organisations and international development partners. The wider educational policy dialogue now identifies sustainable development as a key dimension of learning and argues that education is not only about teaching knowledge but also values, skills, and action for the long-term well-being of both people and planet (Hayati et al., 2024).

Lastly, it has demonstrated that civic education and SDGs are well incorporated and implemented in post-primary schools. The students are more informed, engaged citizens, communities benefit from their participation and what they contribute, and public education systems become leaner as they come to understand more clearly the networked nature of our 21st-century flock of problems. These impacts are proof of the value of this type of education and, with the right investment and political will, reveal that it should be possible to scale-up and roll-out a process of education that re-assumes an active role in the global goals for sustainable development (Akçay et al., 2024).

7. Conclusion

Civic education and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) intersection as a vibrant and an inevitable framework in teaching secondary school students the knowledge, belief and competency for effective citizenship and sustainable development. This research underscores the importance of Civic Education to the development of students' global understanding and critical thinking skills and the facilitation of active involvement in the issue of global concern like poverty, injustice, inequity and environmental destruction— which are all part of the SDGs. The main discoveries are that Civic Education, when properly integrated into secondary education, curriculum not only enhances pupils' knowledge of democratic values and systems of government, but also cements their ability to become effective agents of sustainable development at local, national and global levels. The research also suggested on what it believes are gaps in Civic Education provisions in most educational systems which could be attributed to outdated pedagogical practices, insufficient resources and a mismatch between set objectives and targets of the SDGs.

The research also finds that most teachers are either inadequately equipped or have limited resources at their disposal for teaching Civic Education in an engaging and informed manner in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Where a Civic Education curriculum is available, it is usually considered an optional or additional aspect of a comprehensive education. But case studies and best practices from specific schools show how, when Civic Education is layered over with real-world application, project-based learning, and community engagement, students foster a greater sense of civic responsibility and are more committed to practicing sustainability. These results indicate that there is a call for a change in the theory and practice of Civic Education from the traditional to the contemporary form of practical engagement grounded in the values and goals of the SDGs.

Multiple implications are drawn from the results for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. Policy-makers should focus on the mainstreaming of SDG-relevant Civic Education in the education systems to ensure that curriculum standards reflect the importance of global challenges of sustainable development. The investment in a training course for teachers is essential in order to provide teachers with pedagogical and content knowledge that has an impact on Civic Education teaching. These should be locally and globally appropriate, including the development of teaching resources, learning materials and assessments to ensure such resources reflect both local perspectives and global objectives. (For educators) The need to use participatory and learner-centred practices that link classroom learning with actual civic engagement and sustainability efforts. Partners, youth, civil society, the private sector and international development partners all have a role to play to help schools with resources, funding and technical knowledge, especially in under-resourced areas.

Regarding the future, there is an evident requirement that more research be conducted on the long-term effects of Civic Education programs on students' attitudes and behaviours concerning sustainable development. Prospective researchers may wish to investigate the use of different teaching approaches, whether digital technology plays a role in improving Civic Education or how systemic obstacles to implementation can be overcome. Comparing with other countries or regions may offer good references of best practices and flexible models. In addition, more research involving students as co-producers of knowledge, either through participatory action research or youth-led efforts, would likely lead to greater insight and more relevant interventions. In the field, work should concentrate on developing inclusive, tailored Civic Education packages that mirror the varying cultural, economic and political contexts of secondary schools.

In summary, when implemented meaningfully with the Sustainable Development Goals, Civic Education can be a transformative weapon in building the capacities of young people to tackle the challenges of the world with enlightened minds and caring hearts. IJECSE Vol 1 (1) 2019 Toggle Sliding Bar Area With intention, secondary schools can be incubators of sustainability and citizenship-forming students who are prepared to lead us toward a better, fairer, more sustainable world.

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