

Technology

Sustainable Education: Students with Disabilities

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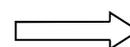
The Adaptech Research Network and Salford University

In a recent article entitled “Étudiants handicapés contre la hausse!”, Geneviève Vanier referred to the notion of sustainable education: the idea that education should be available and accessible to all citizens. Indeed, education is a component of social sustainability – a set of global objectives aimed at achieving a more equitable and ecological planet. Sustainable Education promotes availability and accessibility to all. What exactly does sustainable education entail for students with disabilities?

Briefly stated, ‘available’ refers to the ability to access educational institutions both legally and physically. In Canada, individuals have a legal right to education; however, accessing educational institutions is not always possible for all people. There are many educational institutions, for instance, with inaccessible buildings and many classrooms that maintain disabling barriers for students. Such realities necessarily limit equity.

‘Access’ means having the tools that allow students with disabilities to participate on equal terms. The lack of resources and the existence of inaccessible infrastructures/ technologies, for instance, limit access. Most importantly, do educational institutions at all levels have the funding to provide proper services to compensate for inaccessible built, technological and human barriers? Proponents of social sustainability state that the number of individuals receiving higher education must increase, and all of these components must be available and accessible for sustainable education to work for students with disabilities.

In order to assess the existence of sustainable education for persons with disabilities in Canada, it is helpful to review the information gathered by the Adaptech Research Network over the last 16 years. From this research, we can see that:



There are more students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of which are students with learning disabilities and mental health issues. Access needed by these individuals is not related to the built environment. It primarily revolves around technologies and attitudes. Though some technology is accessible, most is not and it is seldom affordable. Some companies, however, are making an effort to address this problem.

The question remains where are the larger number of young people with physical and sensorial disabilities? For a true sustainable society to exist, all individuals should be included, especially those groups that were previously marginalized.

On a positive note, a recent study by the Adaptech Research Network indicates that students with disabilities that obtain a postsecondary degree often find employment loosely related in their field of study. So, the challenge for the government moving forward is to ensure that the trends of better access, technology and the required services that have served as facilitators continue and improve. As alluded by Geneviève in her article, it is necessary for students with all types of disabilities to have access to good services and financial support for their education. Similarly, research from Adaptech underlines the importance of disability-related financial support for students who incur additional expenses due to their disabilities. If we are to achieve social sustainability, however, it is important to ensure that the success achieved by students throughout their education is repeated in employment.