



**CHETANA**  
International Journal of Education (CIJE)

Peer Reviewed/Refereed Journal  
ISSN : 2455-8279 (E)/2231-3613 (P)

**Impact Factor**  
**SJIF 2026-8.584**



**Prof. A.P. Sharma**  
Founder Editor, CIJE  
(25.12.1932 - 09.01.2019)

**Green Leadership and Environmental Sustainability:  
A Strategic Imperative for Higher Education Institutions in India**

**Vikash Bareth**

Research Scholar

**Dr. Anjoo Chauhan**

Associate Professor

Maharishi Arvind University, Jaipur

Email: vikashbareth@gmail.com, Mobile No: 8741844444

Email: anjoochauhanghosh@gmail.com, Mobile: 9983800089

.....  
First draft received: 07.02.2026, Reviewed: 09.02.2026

Final proof received: 11.02.2026, Accepted: 15.02.2026

**Abstract**

*Environmental sustainability has transitioned from a peripheral concern to a central strategic priority for institutions worldwide. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India are uniquely positioned to influence environmental governance through academic instruction, research innovation, campus operations, and societal engagement. However, the effective integration of sustainability into institutional systems requires transformative leadership. This study explores the concept of green leadership as a strategic imperative for Indian HEIs. Drawing upon leadership theories, sustainability governance frameworks, stakeholder theory, and institutional theory, the paper proposes an integrated multidimensional model linking leadership commitment with environmental performance outcomes. The study argues that green leadership enhances institutional resilience, improves regulatory compliance, strengthens stakeholder trust, and contributes to national and global sustainability goals, including commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals framework of the United Nations. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations, implementation pathways, and a future research agenda for empirical validation.*

**Keywords:** Green Leadership, Environmental Sustainability, Higher Education Institutions, Strategic Governance, India, ESG, Sustainable Development Goals.

**Introduction**

Environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion have intensified the demand for responsible leadership across institutions. Global agreements such as the Paris Agreement and sustainability initiatives led by the United Nations under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasized the need for transformative leadership.

In our country, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are uniquely positioned to promote environmental responsibility through education, research, campus management, and community engagement. However, achieving sustainability requires more than policy declarations it demands visionary and committed leadership at institutional levels.

Green leadership is now a strategic imperative for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to tackle environmental challenges, align with SDGs, and foster sustainable campuses. Integrating green practices and policies into institutional, academic, and administrative

frameworks reduces environmental impact while promoting long-term sustainability. This shift encourages eco-conscious behavior among students and strengthens institutional reputation. Through this paper we try to explore how green leadership serves as a strategic imperative for Indian HEIs and propose a comprehensive implementation framework.

**Review Of Literature**

**Concept of Green Leadership** - Green leadership in Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) involves motivating staff and students toward pro-environmental behaviors and integrating sustainability into core policies, curriculum, and campus operations. It is a strategic imperative that balances ecological stewardship with institutional growth, transforming HEIs into agents of sustainable development.

Green leadership is the ability of leaders to influence, inspire, and motivate organizational members to adopt pro-environmental behaviors, ultimately achieving a vision of long-term ecological sustainability.

Green leadership refers to leadership practices that integrate environmental sustainability into strategic planning, governance, decision-making, and organizational culture. It emphasizes ethical responsibility, ecological stewardship, and long-term value creation.

Current literature emphasizes that green leadership in higher education is crucial for fostering "Green Organizational Citizenship Behaviour". It highlights the need for a shift from passive compliance to proactive environmental stewardship, where leaders empower employees to participate in ecological initiatives. Research indicates a shift toward "emotional green leadership," where emotionally intelligent leaders drive sustainability in the academic sector.

### Theoretical Foundations

1. **Transformational Leadership Theory** – Inspires innovation and institutional change.
2. **Servant Leadership Theory** – Prioritizes societal and environmental well-being.
3. **Stakeholder Theory** – Advocates balancing environmental, social, and economic interests.
4. **Institutional Theory** – Explains sustainability adoption due to regulatory and societal pressures.

Research indicates that leadership commitment directly influences environmental performance, employee engagement, and organizational reputation.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the strategic role of green leadership in Indian HEIs.
2. To analyze environmental sustainability practices applicable to universities.
3. To propose a strategic framework for integrating sustainability into institutional governance.
4. To identify challenges and suggest policy recommendations.

### Research Methodology

This research methodology is designed to investigate the role of green leadership in driving environmental sustainability within Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Given the complex, interdisciplinary nature of sustainability, a mixed-methods research design is most appropriate, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from institutional leaders. This study is conceptual and analytical in nature. It is based on:

- Secondary data from academic journals, sustainability reports, and government policy documents.
- Analysis of sustainability frameworks used by universities globally.
- Review of Indian higher education governance structures.

### Role of Green Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

Green leadership is a strategic imperative for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to drive environmental

sustainability by embedding eco-friendly practices, such as green campus initiatives, in policy. Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a sustainability culture through curriculum integration, waste reduction, and energy management, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4 & 13) and national policies like NEP 2020. Effective, green, leadership in India, particularly when driven by, NAAC mandates and, NEP 2020, is crucial to, transforming, universities into centers of sustainability, balancing, academic excellence with, environmental, responsibility.

**Vision and Policy Formulation** - Green leadership is a strategic imperative for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to drive sustainability, aligning with Agenda 2030 and national goals. It involves embedding eco-friendly practices in governance, curriculum, and campus operations, with leaders fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. Effective, visionary leadership is essential to transform campuses into sustainable models, promoting green skills and long-term ecological balance. Leadership must embed sustainability into:

- Institutional mission and vision statements
- Strategic development plans
- Environmental policies
- ESG-based governance structures

Top management commitment is critical for long-term sustainability integration.

**Sustainable Campus Operations** - Green leadership is a critical, strategic imperative for Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) to foster environmental sustainability, acting as both educators and exemplars of eco-friendly practices. It involves shifting from traditional, short-term management to long-term, ethical governance that integrates sustainability into curriculum, research, and campus operations. Green leaders drive sustainable campus operations including energy efficiency, waste management, and green building while fostering a culture of ecological stewardship among students and staff. Green leadership promotes:

- Energy-efficient infrastructure
- Solar energy installations
- Water harvesting systems
- Solid waste management
- Digital and paperless administration
- Carbon footprint assessment

Operational sustainability reduces costs while enhancing environmental credibility.

**Curriculum Integration** - Green leadership is a strategic imperative for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to drive sustainability, aligning with NEP 2020 and SDG goals. Leaders act as change agents, embedding environmental awareness, fostering green skills, and implementing, green campus initiatives (e.g., solar, waste management). Curriculum integration ensures sustainability is embedded across disciplines, shaping environmentally responsible future leaders. HEIs can incorporate sustainability into:

- Environmental Studies modules
- Sustainable Business Practices
- Green Finance and Accounting
- CSR and ESG reporting
- Climate change management

Future leaders must be trained to adopt sustainable decision-making.

**Research and Innovation** - Green leadership is a strategic imperative for HEIs in India, acting as a critical catalyst for transitioning toward environmental sustainability, in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. As major consumers of resources and hubs for future leaders, Indian HEIs are increasingly expected to move beyond ad-hoc green practices to a "whole-institution approach" that embeds sustainability into governance, research, and campus life. Institutional leaders should encourage:

- Interdisciplinary environmental research
- Green technology incubation
- Industry partnerships for sustainable innovation
- Funding proposals aligned with SDGs

**Community Engagement** - Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a strategic imperative for sustainability, requiring integration of eco-friendly practices into curricula, research, and campus operations. Through community engagement, HEIs act as catalysts for change, partnering with local communities on renewable energy and waste management. HEIs can act as sustainability hubs by:

- Conducting awareness drives
- Supporting local environmental initiatives
- Collaborating with municipal authorities
- Promoting student-led environmental movements

#### Strategic Framework for Green Leadership in HEIS

Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a strategic imperative for fostering sustainability through curriculum, campus operations, and community engagement, addressing SDGs to enhance institutional reputation and resilience. A robust framework involves integrating sustainability into governance, implementing green human resource management (GHRM), reducing carbon footprints, and promoting environmental education. A four-pillar model is proposed:

##### Pillar 1: Strategic Commitment

- Leadership vision
- Sustainability governance committee
- Policy documentation

##### Pillar 2: Operational Implementation

- Resource efficiency
- Renewable energy adoption

- Sustainable procurement

##### Pillar 3: Academic Integration

- Curriculum redesign
- Sustainability-focused research
- Faculty development programs

##### Pillar 4: Performance Measurement

- Sustainability audits
- Environmental KPIs
- Annual sustainability reports
- NAAC and accreditation alignment

#### Benefits of Green Leadership in HEIS

Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) drives environmental sustainability by integrating green practices into governance, reducing carbon footprints, and embedding sustainability in curricula. Key benefits include cultivating sustainable, future-ready, and eco-conscious students, boosting operational efficiency (energy/water/waste management), enhancing institutional reputation, and creating living laboratories for sustainable development.

- Improved institutional ranking and accreditation scores- Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) acts as a strategic imperative, driving improved rankings and accreditation (e.g., NAAC, NIRF, THE Impact) by directly enhancing sustainability-focused metrics. Proactive green initiatives—such as energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable infrastructure—boost institutional reputation, attract students, and align with global SDGs.
- Enhanced brand image- Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) acts as a strategic imperative, transforming institutions into sustainable, responsible, and forward-thinking entities. Key benefits include improved institutional reputation, reduced environmental footprint through green operations, enhanced student and faculty engagement, and fostering innovation, leading to a stronger brand image and long-term viability.
- Attraction of environmentally conscious students- Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) fosters environmental sustainability by enhancing institutional reputation, reducing operational costs, and attracting environmentally conscious students. By implementing green campuses and sustainable curricula, institutions meet the demand for eco-friendly education, fostering student engagement and shaping future leaders.
- Increased funding opportunities - Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) fosters environmental sustainability, serving as a key differentiator to attract environmentally conscious students who prefer

sustainable, green-certified campuses. By implementing green policies, solar energy, waste management, and sustainable curricula, institutions enhance their reputation, attracting top talent and building a culture of ecological responsibility.

- Cost savings through energy efficiency - Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) acts as a strategic imperative, driving environmental sustainability through campus greening initiatives like energy, water, and waste management. It transforms institutions into "living labs" that reduce operational footprints, foster environmental awareness, and deliver significant cost savings through improved energy efficiency.
- Compliance with environmental regulations - Green leadership in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) acts as a strategic imperative, driving environmental sustainability through compliance, cost reduction, and enhanced reputation. It ensures adherence to regulations (like Supreme Court mandates), reduces waste, fosters eco-conscious campus cultures, and integrates sustainability into curriculum and operations

### Challenges in Implementing Green Leadership

Implementing green leadership in Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) is a strategic imperative for sustainability but faces significant hurdles, including severe resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of trained personnel. Key challenges include bureaucratic apathy, resistance to cultural change, lack of standardized, unified sustainability frameworks, and poor integration of environmental topics across curricula. Major challenges are as follows-

1. Financial constraints
2. Resistance to change
3. Lack of trained sustainability professionals
4. Limited awareness among stakeholders
5. Weak monitoring mechanisms

Effective change management and phased planning can address these barriers.

### Policy Implications for India

Government of India play a central role in formulating policies and regulations that promote sustainability. This includes setting environmental standards, establishing emissions targets, and enforcing regulations that minimize environmental degradation and promote resource efficiency. Indian HEIs should align sustainability efforts with:

- National Education Policy (NEP 2020)
- SDGs framework
- Environmental protection regulations
- Green campus initiatives by regulatory bodies

Government incentives and performance-linked sustainability metrics can accelerate adoption.

### Conclusion

Green leadership has emerged as a strategic imperative for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India as they navigate increasing environmental, regulatory, and societal pressures. By embedding sustainability into governance, curriculum, campus operations, and stakeholder engagement, institutional leaders can transform universities into models of responsible development. Alignment with global commitments such as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations strengthens institutional credibility and resilience. Ultimately, proactive green leadership enhances environmental performance, operational efficiency, academic relevance, and long-term competitiveness, ensuring that HEIs contribute meaningfully to sustainable national and global progress.

Green leadership is not merely an environmental initiative but a strategic necessity for Higher Education Institutions in India. By embedding sustainability into governance, operations, curriculum, and research, HEIs can significantly contribute to environmental protection and socio-economic development. Visionary leadership ensures that institutions become models of responsible growth while preparing future leaders committed to sustainability.

Adopting green leadership principles will enable Indian HEIs to transition from compliance-based sustainability to innovation-driven environmental excellence.

### References

- Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). Strategic management: A stakeholder approach.
- United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals Report.
- Paris Agreement (2015).
- IPCC Climate Change Assessment Reports.