



The Influence of Cultural Context on the Interpretation and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in EFL Education

Sanar M. Thamer
Al-Nahrain university

Corresponding Author: Sanar M. Thamer, sanaralbahadly@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Translation, Language, Global, Engagement

Received : 1, September
Revised : 15, September
Accepted : 28, October

©2025 Thamer: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

The present research sought to explore the influence of cultural context on the interpretation and implementation of sustainable development goals in EFL education. The research followed the descriptive analytical method of research. (200) university students responded to a questionnaire of (24) items distributed over four dimensions. The results of the data analysis indicated that strong agreement among most of the respondents about the cultural contexts influence on the integration of sustainable development goals in Education (mean= 77%), ensuring that culture has a significant impact in how sustainability topics are perceived and discussed. Based on these results, the research concluded that while there are positive motivations and a high global awareness regarding sustainability-based education, there is a persistent need to respect and implement the students' cultural and personal relevance in order to deepen the understanding and engagement of students

INTRODUCTION

In the recent age which marked by the prevalence of environmental challenges and problems, social inequality, and economic degradation, education is considered a prominent force for global improvement. One of the effective educational responses for these problems is education based on sustainable development. The integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into education has become a global priority, with particular emphasis on enhancing learners' awareness of environmental, social, and economic challenges.

Stemming from the sustainable development goals stated by the United Nations, education should seek to empower learners to contribute actively to a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. Consequently, it has emerged as a key strategy, recognized for its potential to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to contribute effectively to a sustainable future (Kopnina, 2018). Based on this view, education for sustainable development is a holistic and transformational, lifelong learning process that aims to enhance the cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of learning (UNESCO, 2017). Sustainable education, furthermore, refers to finding sustainable solutions to environmental, social, and economic problems through education (Landorf, et al.2008).

Research highlights the positive impact of integrating sustainability in education, especially in higher education, Al-Nuaimi and Al-Ghamdi (2022) conclude that education integrated with sustainability significantly fosters pro-environmental consumption behaviors, they consider education as a crucial vehicle for embedding sustainable consumption principles for the future. Similarly, McConnon (2020) highlight the role of education for sustainable development in higher education and emphasizing that using institutional sustainability initiatives and building knowledge and enhancing awareness can significantly advance ESD integration.

Therefore, education is critical because it can change people's behavior. It is often acknowledged that influencing students' views toward the global issues depends on providing them with suitable attitudes, values, responsibilities, and abilities from an early age ([Mahat et al., 2017](#)). Similarly, Michelsen & Fischer (2021) advocate that educational institutions have the responsibility to undergo a comprehensive transformation, to enhance new positive attitudes and perspectives which support sustainable change in educational disciplines. Additionally, Franco et al. (2018) highlight the responsibility of educational institutions in promoting sustainability awareness by aligning their policies with the United Nations sustainable development goals. Topics like green banking (Neama, et al. 2023) and green Entrepreneurship which gains great interest when it tries hardly to achieve green economy as well as achieving sustainable development goals (Neama, et al. 2023), could be integrated in education and increase learners' awareness and responsibility towards environmental and economic sustainability..

Despite the efforts of educational institutions and organizations in supporting the implementation of sustainable development goals in education, one of the key issues affecting this implementation include the consideration of

various cultural traditions (Shields, 2023). In this regard, Vantamay (2018) mentions that the students' cultural contexts influence students' prosocial and environmentally responsible behavior. Furthermore, students' culture and perceptions affect how sustainability and sustainable development are taken into account in teaching and learning, either it is positive or negative (Pilgrimienè, et al. 2020). Reinforcing this idea, Al-Naqbi & Alshannag (2018) concludes that cultural dimensions have significantly influence students' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability across different contexts. In this way, an open culture is more likely to support sustainability whereas, a culture characterized by resistance to change, or short-term thinking may pose a barrier to sustainability ([Acemoglu and Robinson, 2021](#)). Thus, cultural contexts stand as an effective factor in shaping how sustainability is understood, taught, and internalized by learners and instructors.

Although values are considered a universal constructs transcending specific situations, the meanings differ based on how sustainable consumption is defined, and the cultural context in operation (Lasarov et al., 2019). However, there are few studies that provide knowledge on how cultural influences shape consumption in the context of sustainability (Chwialkowska et al., 2020).

Based on the results of the previous studies, it is obvious that there is a gap between the global vision of sustainable development and its pedagogical application in local educational community. Little attention has been paid to how cultural contexts affect EFL learners' interpretation of sustainability issues or how they are implemented by educators. Understanding these cultural aspects is crucial to develop effective, context-sensitive curricula that align global sustainability aims with local educational realities. This study seeks to explore the cultural factors influencing the integration of sustainability in EFL learning, aiming to inform future pedagogical approaches and curriculum design that are both globally informed and locally grounded.

The present research could be significant as it promotes the deeper engagement of students within the dimensions of the education for sustainability, through a culturally aligned content in the classrooms, exploring their perspectives towards sustainability. By identifying how the local cultural norms and values shape sustainability perceptions, learners could be trained to connect to global issues with their local realities through global awareness enhancement and adaptation strategies. For higher education institutions, the research may provide a framework for designing inclusive, context-sensitive curricula that integrate sustainability into language education, aligning sustainable development goals [صهفا](#) students' relevant cultural contexts. Moreover, for educators, policymakers, and organizations invested in sustainability, the research highlights the importance of global awareness in educational initiatives. It encourages the development of teaching strategies that respect cultural diversity while enhancing sustainable awareness, thereby increasing the effectiveness of SDG implementation across diverse educational environments.

Research Purpose

The present research tries to explore how cultural contexts affect the way SDGs are interpreted and implemented into EFL education, focusing on EFL students' perceptions, practices, and attitudes.

Research Questions

The research tried to answer the following questions:

1. How are the SDGs interpreted by EFL teachers and learners in Iraqi university?
2. To what extent are the SDGs implemented in EFL instruction and materials?
3. What cultural factors influence the integration of sustainability themes in EFL education?
4. What are the attitudes towards sustainability and EFL learning?

Research Delimitations

The research delimited to the following:

1. Exploring the influence of cultural context on the interpretation and implementation of sustainable development goals in EFL education.
2. 200 students were selected from the second year, faculties of business economics , university of Alnhrian
3. The academic year 2024- 2025

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education for Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is defined by Kelly (2012, 23) as a process of change that enhances the livelihoods of current and future generations without exceeding the Earth's ecological limits. According to this broad definition, the education for sustainable development emerges as a transformative, lifelong learning approach aimed at fostering cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral competencies essential for sustainable living(Kondakci, et al. 2018). From another perspective, this education is a multidimensional approach that provides learners with the knowledge, values, and skills to face global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable resource consumption, and social inequality (Guo-Brennan, 2022, 174). It is a type of education that serves global community to overcome challenges through enhancing learners' global awareness and responsibility towards international community. It is defined as a lifelong learning process which aimed to foster cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competences necessary for global awareness (UNESCO, 2018). It also specifically focuses on restructuring educational systems to cultivate sustainability-oriented mindsets, values, and actions, particularly within higher education institutions (Zguir et al., 2021).

Moreover, Sustainable education emphasizes a shift in the educational process that targeted to integrated sustainability into both theory and practice. It is rooted in three core dimensions of sustainability: ecological, social, and economic, which must be balanced and interlinked to support global awareness and human well-being(Wals & Kieft, 2010). Consequently, as stated by (Al-Naqbi

& Alshannag, 2018) It calls on both formal and non-formal educational dimensions to engage in initiatives that promote quality of life, empowerment, and global interdependence.

Recent empirical studies further illustrate the transformative potential of ESD. Abdullahi, et al. (2024), in a study conducted in Somalia, explored the influence of ESD on university students' behavior of, 251 students from SIMAD and Hormuud Universities in Mogadishu. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between ESD and pro-environmental behavior, highlighting the importance of integrating ESD into university curricula to promote cultural norms supportive of sustainable practices. Similarly, Rahmania (2024) examined how environmental and psychosocial factors shape students' sustainable behavior in school contexts. Employing a mixed-methods approach, results pointed to the pivotal role of the school environment in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability.

Sund & Gericke (2020) highlighted the role of initiatives such as "UNESCO global action program on sustainable development in Education" (2014) and the "global competence framework (2018) in providing guidelines for integrating sustainable concepts and values into various disciplines. Cordova (2024) states that the integration of sustainable development goals in EFL classrooms provide a range of benefits for both in service teachers and students: students were given the support to expand their learning, enhance their thinking skills and develop the capacity to proactively discussing a variety of problems. They were encouraged to handle the sustainable issues, fostering a sense of ownership and purpose, rather than merely striving for knowledge and comprehension. Astawa, et al. (2024) revealed that involving the global issues as listed in sustainable development goals in education is necessarily done in the education process, especially in EFL learning. Exposure to global issues is known to improve students' understanding, awareness, and ability to solve urgent issues faced by global society.

To sum up, ESD is essential for achieving the sustainable development goals stated by the United Nations. This multidimensional approach offer a strategic framework for reshaping educational systems and fostering the competencies needed to navigate and address complex global challenges.

Cultural Context and Education

Cultural context refers to the shared customs, values, beliefs, and practices within a society. Holliday (1999) noted that cultural context is multifaceted, incorporating social, historical, and geographical dimensions that directly affect pedagogical practices and outcomes.

Regarding to education, a key component of understanding and navigating cultural contexts is the concept of cultural intelligence which enables educators to comprehend and effectively respond to cultural diversity (Earley and Ang, 2003). Procel, et al. (2023) emphasize this intelligence enhances teacher adaptability and sensitivity, allowing for improved classroom interaction and intercultural competence. This responsiveness contributes to more culturally attuned instruction and fosters inclusive learning environments.

Teacher's beliefs and culture also have a critical role in shaping pedagogical approaches. Muhtaseb, et al. (2023) found that educators' cultural perceptions significantly influence their choice of teaching methods and materials. Similarly, Shih (2024) concludes that understanding a teacher's own cultural background can inform more contextually appropriate curriculum design. These findings underscore the importance of reflective teaching practices and cultural awareness in ELT. In the same context, García & Pavón (2021) revealed how national policies align with or contradict cultural norms, thereby influencing educational goals and instructional practices. Furthermore, Abdalla & Moussa (2024) highlighted the importance of embedding students' cultural identities in the learning process. They explore that when learner's culture is respected, this approach empowers students, enhances motivation, and fosters more positive academic outcomes.

To sum up, cultural context has an effective role in education by shaping teacher beliefs, instructional strategies, curriculum design, and student outcomes. Effective education process should be grounded in cultural awareness and sensitivity, supported by institutional policies, teacher training and that culture diversity and inclusivity should be respected and acknowledged.

Cultural Influence on the Implementation of Sustainability

Culture is an effective factor in shaping how individuals interpret and practice global issues, influencing consumption choices, environmental awareness, and sustainable behaviors. It reflects deeply rooted values, norms, traditions, and historical experiences that determine how issues are perceived and utilized (Mi et al., 2020). More clearly, individuals raised in rural communities often develop sustainability perspectives distinct from those shaped in urban environments due to different interactions with nature and resource availability (Sawang, 2006). Cultural beliefs also shape the attitudes toward environmental issues; societies with a strong sense of connectedness to the natural world are more inclined to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors (Vighnesh, et al. 2022).

Moreover, cultural values directly influence the sustainable consumption patterns, in this respect, Ergun and Rivas (2019) found that Turkish consumers' intentions to purchase green products were strongly influenced by social and emotional values. Similarly, Mi et al. (2020) demonstrated how cultural values in China significantly shaped both private and public pro-environmental behaviors. In Eastern societies, religious and cultural norms exert considerable influence on the collective psyche, often enhancing environmentally conscious actions (Gammoh, et al., 2019; Martin, et al. 2024). Recent research by Mahlaole (2025) provides empirical support for the interaction between cultural context and Education for Sustainable Development. The results revealed that cultural values emphasizing community support and collective responsibility amplified the ESD impact among students in South Africa. Shields (2019) adds that When embedded within culturally adaptive curricula, sustainability education can effectively influence students' values, attitudes, and behaviors. Sustainable psychology also emphasizes the role of individual perceptions, motivations, and

cultural values in shaping environmental behaviors within educational environments (Shields, 2023, Landorf, et al. 2008).

In conclusion, universities are increasingly seek for promoting sustainable values and practices. To achieve this purpose, a focus should be paid to students' identity and perceptions while integrating sustainable development issues, adopting effective pedagogical strategies that encourage them to integrate deeply in the learning activities and think critically and creatively in global issues. A great effort should be done to align sustainable based content with students' cultural contexts: values, norms and traditions, to avoid conflicts and contradiction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study followed the qualitative descriptive method of research design. The researcher used a questionnaire to explore the university EFL students' perceptions and believes about the influence of cultural context on the interpretation and implementation of sustainable goals .

Instrument

The instrument of the research included a questionnaire which consisted of two main parts: the first one handles the demographic information such as gender, age, the academic year and English proficiency level; the other part included twenty four statements distributed over four main dimensions: (1) cultural factors influencing sustainable development, (2)interpretation of SDGs in education, (3)the implementation of SDGs in classroom activities, and lastly (4) the attitudes towards sustainability integration in EFL education. The participants were asked to select the appropriate response from the following (agree- neutral- disagree). The questionnaire in its initial form was validated by a jury members specialized at methodology and instruction in the university level who appreciate its construction and appropriateness to the objective of the research. The psychometric features of the questionnaire was calculated after applying it to a pilot sample of (45 EFL students out of the study group). The piloting of the questionnaire revealed its reliability and validity to explore the participants' views. It also revealed the internal consistency and the clarity of the instruction and the suitability of the questionnaire statements to the linguistic level of the study group.

The Research Population and Sampling

The population of the research included all university students who study EFL. They all enrolled in the second year (n=). The sample of the research included (200) university students; Faculty of....., atuniversity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the questionnaire was to investigate the university EFL students' perceptions and believes about the influence of cultural context on the interpretation and implementation of sustainable goals.

Results of Demographic Information

Students' responses on the questionnaire were analyzed and scored quantitatively. Means and percentages were calculated and interpreted.

Table 1. General Information About Students

Information about Participants		Numbers	Percentage s
Gender	Males	79	39.5 %
	Females	121	60.5%
Academic major		69	34.5 %
		71	35.5%
		60	30%
English proficiency level	B1	100	50 %
	B2	80	40%
	C1	20	10%

It was revealed from the previous table the variedness of the respondents in variables of gender, academic majors and levels of English language proficiency. T

Results of the Questionnaire Dimensions

Regarding the second part of the questionnaire, the results of each statement of the were displayed and discussed in detail. The questionnaire is divided into four main dimensions. Each dimension included a number of statements explore students' view about the influence of culture on sustainability development goals interpretation and implementation in EFL courses.

Dimension (1) Cultural Contexts Influencing the Integration of Sustainable Development Goals in Education

The items of dimension (1) explored the students' view and experiences about the cultural factors that influence sustainability integration. Data were collected and analyzed. percentage of the participants' responses were calculated and presented in table 2.

Table (2): percentage of the participants' responses to the statements of dimension (1)

No.	Item	Percentage		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Cultural system effects on our perception of sustainability issues	71 %	19%	10

2	Topics as gender equality or climate change contradict with our religious values	65%	23%	12%
3	I feel comfortable when courses discuss sustainability topics that align with our own local traditions and values	82%	12%	8%
4	It is usual that teachers avoid specific sustainability topics due to the cultural sensitivity	89%	8%	3%
5	Certain sustainability topics are modified to suit our values system which make them different than in global contexts.	63%	32%	5%
6	Our culture system calls for and support the care for the environment and social responsibility	93%	6%	1%
	Overall	77%	16.5%	6.5%

Results in table (2) revealed the strong agreement among most of the respondents about the cultural contexts Influence on the integration of sustainable development goals in Education (total mean= 77%), ensuring that culture has a significant impact in how sustainability topics are perceived and discussed. It also revealed the high awareness among the participants of how the cultural values and traditions enhance the implementation of sustainable development goals, however, they also clarify their need to more culturally relevant content that modify the contradictions between global values and local cultural values which can be harnessed as assets in contextualizing SDGs in education. It could be revealed additionally that :

1. (71%) of the respondents agree on the influence of culture on their understanding of sustainability, which highlight their awareness of how local norms shape their perceptions to the global topics.
2. (65%) aware of the potential value contradictions and conflicts, especially with the sensitive SDG domains, which may reflect on hesitation rather than deep engagement with certain topics in class discussions.
3. (82%) feel comfortable when SDGs are culturally contextualized, ensuring the necessity of using common cultural examples in their classrooms.
4. (89%) agree that teachers avoid specific sustainability topics due to the cultural sensitivity, emphasizing that their own cultural context in the Arab communities influence curriculum delivery and teachers' perceptions of sustainability integration.
5. (63%) agree that the sustainable issues are discussed differently than in the global contexts, which suggest that global SDG content are sometimes disconnected from their local realities.
6. (93%) agree that the local culture supports the environmental and social ethics, which reveals the potential effect of cultural values on the effective SDG teaching.

Dimension (2) Interpretation of SDGs in EFL Education

The items of dimension (2) explored the students' view and experiences about the interpretation of SDGs in EFL education. Data were collected and analyzed, the percentage of the participants' responses were calculated and presented in in table (3).

Table (3): percentage of the participants responses to the statements of dimension (2)

No.	Item	Percentage		
		Agree	Neutra l	disagree
1	Sustainability based education helps in understanding global challenges better	98 %	2%	-
2	It is meaningful to learn English through topics like clean energy, gender equality, and poverty	74% %	13%	13%
3	SDG topics in English could be related to real environmental issues in my community	69%	22%	9%
4	Some sustainability topics are distant from my personal or cultural experience.	83%	9%	8%
5	I understand the goals of SDG-based lessons when they are linked to my culture.	76%	22%	2%
6	studying SDG-related content motivates me to engage with global issues	96%	3%	1%
	Overall	82.7%	11.8%	5.5%

The previous table showed the percentage of the participants' responses revealing that (82.7%) have a clear positive perception and awareness of how the integrating SDGs into EFL education is interpreted Students strongly support the integration of SDGs in EFL education, especially when content is culturally relevant and locally connected. More specifically, it was revealed that:

1. (98%) of the respondents agree that there is a high educational value in sustainability-themed content, which underscores the effectiveness of integrating sustainable issues into EFL education.
2. (74%) agree that the sustainable issues are meaningful for them, suggesting that many value real-world issues may be relevant to the cultural community traditions.
3. (69%) recognize the local relevance of global issues and the need to connect classroom content to students' lived experiences.
4. (83%) highlight the importance of localizing SDGs based content in EFL classrooms.
5. (76%) clearly acknowledge the cultural contextualization to enhance comprehension which consequently improves the learning outcomes.

6. (96%) agree with the strong motivational influence of sustainability based education when aligning with culture values.

Dimension (3): Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in EFL Activities

The items of dimension (3) explored the students' view and experiences about the implementation of SDGs in EFL classroom activities. Data were collected and analyzed. The percentage of the participants' responses were calculated and presented in table (4).

Table (4): percentage of the participants responses to the statements of dimension (3)

No.	Item	Percentage		
		Agree	Neutral	disagree
1	Many learning activities based on sustainability are conducted in EFL sessions	64 %	23%	13%
2	Our EFL classes include group discussions, debates, or projects on sustainability topics	59% %	27%	14%
3	Teachers encourage us to express opinions and suggest solutions on sustainability problems, especially the environmental ones.	54%	32%	19%
4	SDG topics are discussed in informal or extracurricular settings than in class.	78%	13%	9%
5	Some important sustainability issues are avoided in class due to cultural concerns	73 %	22%	5%
6	EFL activities about sustainability help me improve my language skills and cultural awareness	98%	1%	1
	Overall	67.7%	21.3%	11%

The previous table showed the results of the participants' responses to the third dimension revealing that (67.7%) agree that SDGs based activities are being implemented in EFL classes. It also revealed that the respondents recognize the value of SDGs based EFL activities, especially for improving global and environmental awareness, despite the actual implementation appears inconsistent, with limited use of related activities.

More specifically, the following was revealed:

1. (64%) confirm that the sustainability based activities were clearly presented in the classroom as debates, environmental issues based discussion, designing posters to enhance global awareness.
2. (59%) agree that EFL classes include group discussions, debates, or projects on sustainability topics, indicating that these activities are not spread widely or consistent especially in EFL classes.

3. (54%) confirm that teachers encourage students to express opinions and suggest solutions on sustainability problems and challenges, showing that student voice and critical thinking opportunities may be limited.
4. (78%) agree that they perceive more meaningful SDGs engagement within extracurricular activities such as English clubs, or posters making, and collaborative projects..
5. (73%) shows that students are aware of the type of topics exclusion, due to perceived cultural sensitivity, Indicating a hidden curriculum effect, where certain SDGs (e.g., gender or identity-related) are not fully explored.

Dimension (4): Attitudes Toward Sustainability and Language Learning

The items of dimension (4) explored the students’ view and experiences about the attitudes toward sustainability and language learning. Data were collected and analyzed. The percentage of the participants’ responses were calculated and presented in table (5).

Table (5): percentage of the participants responses to the statements of dimension (4)

No.	Item	Percentage		
		Agree	Neutral	disagree
1	I believe it is important to learn about sustainability through integrating sustainable development goals in EFL curriculum.	73 %	15%	-12%
2	Discussing global issues in EFL class can help me become a better communicator.	71% %	15%	14%
3	I enjoy exploring topics like environmental protection or social justice in English	70%	22%	8%
4	I think sustainability topics can make English classes more engaging..	91%	8%	1%
5	My culture should be respected when global themes are implemented in language learning	99%	1%	-
6	I am ready to learn about different perspectives, even if they differ from my cultural values.	67%	21%	12%
	Overall	78.5%	13.7%	7.8%

The previous table showed the results of the participants responses on the fourth dimension. The results revealed that (78.5%) have strong positive attitudes towards integrating sustainability into EFL education. More specifically, it was revealed that:

1. (73%) believe that it is important to learn about sustainability through integrating SDGs in the EFL curriculum, because of its relevance and appropriateness.
2. (71%) showed an awareness of the communicative benefits of sustainability integration in education.
3. (70%) express enjoyment, positive engagement of certain sustainable issues.
4. (91%) agree that sustainability topics can make English classes more engaging, suggesting that SDG themes support classroom motivation and interest.
5. (99%) advocate that cultural respect is central when engaging with global topics, as well as the cultural sensitivity must guide SDGs integration in education.

General Discussion

Based on the previous results, it was obvious that culture, particularly in Arabic communities, has a crucial role in shaping sustainable behaviors, perceptions of global issues, and the success of sustainability based education. The present research presents empirical evidences that support the influences of culture, especially in Arab communities, in the interpretation, perception, and practice of sustainability-related behaviors in education. In accordance with the studies of Al-Naqbi & Alshannag (2018) and Muhtaseb et al. (2023) which demonstrate how Arab students' environmental attitudes and social media use are influenced by their cultural background, as the present research adds that students' sustainability awareness were significantly influenced by their sense of cultural duty, social norms, and religious principles. This research also supports the results of Mi et al. (2020) and Gammoh et al. (2019) studies which emphasize how cultural values in Eastern societies foster environmentally conscious behaviors.

In addition, the present research agree with the results of, Landorf et al. (2008), Wals & Kieft (2010) and Shields & Lu (2023), underscoring how education and sustainability integration should be culturally responsive to be effective. In aligning with another study of Ergun & Rivas (2019) highlighting how emotional and social values of Arab and Muslim-majority communities, can motivate green consumption, an environmental major issue of SDGs, proving that religious and community based values enhance environmental behavior of students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the previous results, it could be concluded that while there are positive motivations and a high global awareness regarding sustainability based education, there is a persistent need to respect and implement the students' cultural and personal relevance in order to deepen understanding and engagement of students. This means that global sustainable development issues should be aligned with students' cultural and community contexts to achieve effective integration of sustainability in education. Furthermore, culture has a significant role in shaping how sustainability issues are perceived, influencing

the students' both environmental and social responsibility. However, certain global issues, such as gender equality, may present conflicts with traditional cultural values, which can lead instructors to avoid certain topics due to cultural sensitivity, awareness of these issues is required for global awareness enhancement. While cultures can align with sustainability values, prevailing cultural norms may simultaneously restrict open discussion on certain sustainability themes. Ultimately, although sustainability integration is viewed positively, a culturally contextualized approach remains essential for reinforcing engagement and fostering highly effective integration to sustainable development. Thus, aligning sustainability education with Arab cultural norms and values is not only necessary, it is strategic and essential for avoiding bad effects.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results related to the influence of cultural contexts on the interpretation and implementation of sustainability among EFL university students, several recommendations are suggested:

1. Teachers and curriculum designers must ensure cultural sensitivity, creating bridge for connecting between diverse perspectives while handling the global mindset.
2. Universities should involve SDGs within the curriculum by aligning it with students' cultural values, religious beliefs, and traditions to ensure greater relevance and acceptance.
3. Universities should encourage sustainability educational approaches that emphasize global responsibility and community support. Service-learning and experiential projects are best examples that can connect global sustainability goals to local cultural contexts.
4. Teachers should be trained in the professional development programs to be equipped with the skills of implementing sustainability practices and behaviors.
5. Educational policy makers should advocate for educational policies that mandate the inclusion of cultural and religious values in the national ESD strategies, particularly in Arab communities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future studies should further explore how sustainability education can be effectively adapted to align with diverse cultural and community contexts, particularly within Arab societies. Research should investigate practical frameworks and pedagogical models that integrate sustainability principles while respecting traditional values and cultural sensitivities. Longitudinal studies could also assess how culturally contextualized sustainability education influences students' environmental awareness, social responsibility, and long-term behavioral change. Additionally, comparative research across different cultural settings would provide insights into how local traditions either support or challenge global sustainability goals. Such studies would contribute to developing more inclusive, culturally responsive, and effective strategies for advancing sustainability education worldwide.

REFERENCES

- Abdalla, H., & Moussa, A. (2024). Culturally responsive teaching: Navigating models and implementing effective strategies. *Acta Pedagogica Asiana*, 3(2), 91-100.
- Abdullahi, A. M., Hussein, H. A., Ahmed, M. Y., Hussein, O. A., & Warsame, A. A. (2024). The impact of education for sustainable development on university students' sustainability behavior: A case study from undergraduate students in Somalia. *Frontiers in Education*, 9.
- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2021). Culture, institutions and social equilibria: A framework. *Journal of Economic Literature*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28162> (Note: Original paper was an NBER working paper; if citing that, use: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 28162)
- Al-Naqbi, A. K., & Alshannag, Q. (2018). The status of education for sustainable development and sustainability knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of UAE university students. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 19(3), 566-588.
- Al-Naqbi, A. K., & Alshannag, Q. (2018). The status of education for sustainable development and sustainability knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of UAE university students. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 19(3), 566-588.
- Al-Nuaimi, S. R., & Al-Ghamdi, S. G. (2022). Sustainable consumption and education for sustainability in higher education. *Sustainability*, 14(12), 7255.
- Chwialkowska, A., Bhatti, W. A., & Glowik, M. (2020). The influence of cultural values on pro-environmental behavior [Post-print version]. *Journal of Business Research*. ©2020 Elsevier.
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford University Press.
- Ergun, M., & Rivas, F. (2019). The effect of social roles, religiosity, and values on climate change concern: An empirical analysis for Turkey. *Sustainable Development*, 27(4), 758-769.
- Gammoh, B., Sam, C., Okoroafo, A., & Koh, C. K. (2019). Cultural influences on environmental consciousness and green environmental behavior. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 11(1), 20-20
- García, M., & Pavón, V. (2012). Investigating the coexistence of the mother tongue and the foreign language through teacher collaboration in CLIL contexts: Perceptions and practice of the teachers involved in the plurilingual

- programme in Andalusia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 15(5), 1–20.
- Kelly, S. S. (2012). Economic impact of international students attending an institution of higher education in the United States (Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University). LSU Digital Commons.
- Kondakci, Y., Bedenlier, S., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2018). Social network analysis of international student mobility: Uncovering the rise of regional hubs. *Higher Education*, 75, 517–535. □ Wals, A. E., & Kieft, G. (2010). Education for sustainable development: Research overview. *Sida Review*.
- Kopnina, H. (2018). Education for sustainable development (ESD): The turn away from 'environment' in environmental education? In *Environmental and sustainability education policy* (pp. 135–153). Routledge.
- Landorf, H., Doscher, S., & Rocco, T. (2008). Education for sustainable human development: Towards a definition. *Theory and Research in Education*, 6(2), 221–236.
- Lasarov, W., Mai, R., García-de-Frutos, N., Ortega Egea, J. M., & Hoffmann, S. (2019). Counter-arguing as barriers to environmentally motivated consumption reduction: A multi-country study. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(1), 113–127.
- Mahat, M., Bradbeer, C., Byers, T., & Imms, W. (2018). Innovative learning environments and teacher change: Defining key concepts.
- Mahlaole, S. T. (2025). Education for sustainable development's role in influencing sustainable consumption behavior among international students: A multi-group analysis. *Discover Education*, 4, 104.
- Martin, A., Balvanera, P., Raymond, C. M., Gómez-Baggethun, E., Eser, U., Gould, R. K., Guibrunet, L., Harmáčková, Z. V., Horcea-Milcu, A. I., Koessler, A.-K., Kumar, R., Lenzi, D., Merçon, J., Nthenge, A., O'Farrell, P. J., Pascual, U., Rode, J., Yoshida, Y., & Zafra-Calvo, N. (2024). Sustainability-aligned values: Exploring the concept, evidence, and practice. *Ecology and Society*, 29(4), Article 18. Landorf, H., Doscher, S., & Rocco, T. (2008). Education for sustainable human development: Towards a definition. *Theory and Research in Education*, 6(2), 221–236.
- McConnon, R. (2020). Measures to facilitate the scale-up of education for sustainable development in higher education. *International Journal of Sustainable Society*, 12(1), 36–50.
- Mi, L., Sun, Y., Gan, X., Yang, H., Lv, T., Shang, K., Qiao, Y., & Jiang, Z. (2020). Promoting employee green behavior through the person-organization fit: The moderating effect of psychological distance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 568385.

- Muhtaseb, R., Traxler, J. & Scott, H. (2023). Educators' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture on Social Media Use in Education in Palestine. 18(1). 271-301
- Neama, N. H., Abbood, R. H., & Yahya, A. E. (2023). Role of Green Entrepreneurship in Supporting Small and Medium Entrepreneurial Projects/ Case Study of Malaysia. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 11, 2908-2913.
- Neama N.& Abbood, R. & Abbood, I. (2023). The Role of Green Banking in Achieving Sustainable Development. *SICB, SBD* 135, pp. 178–186.
- Procel, G. & Tacuri, Manuel & López, Katherine & Criollo, Pablo. (2023). The Influence of Cultural Context on English Teaching.. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar*. 7(4). 784-800.
- Rahmania, T. (2024). Exploring school environmental psychology in children and adolescents: The influence of environmental and psychosocial factors on sustainable behavior in Indonesia. *Heliyon*, 10(18), e37881.
- Sawang, S. (2006). Are Country and Culture Values Interchangeable?: A Case Example Using Occupational Stress and Coping. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. 6(2). 205-219.
- Shields, R., & Lu, T. (2023). Uncertain futures: Climate change and international student mobility in Europe. *Higher Education*.
- Shields, R., & Lu, T. (2023). Uncertain futures: Climate change and international student mobility in Europe. *Higher Education*.
- Shih, Y. (2024). Culturally responsive curriculum: A systematic overview. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 8(6), 6917–6925. Learning Gate.
- UNESCO (2017). A new roadmap for the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme and its world network of biosphere reserves MAB strategy (2015–2025). Lima action plan (2016–2025). Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Vantamay, N. (2018). Investigation and recommendations on the promotion of sustainable consumption behavior among young consumers in Thailand. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 39(1), 51–58.
- Vighnesh, N., Balachandra, P., Chandrashekar, D. & Sawang, S. (2022). How cultural values influence sustainable consumption behavior? An empirical investigation in a non-Western context. *Sustainable Development*. 31(1). 990-1007.

Zguir, M. F., Dubis, S., & Koç, M. (2021). Embedding education for sustainable development (ESD) and SDGs values in curriculum: A comparative review on Qatar, Singapore and New Zealand. *Journal*