

# Policy Perspectives on Education for Sustainable Development

ABSTRACTS

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## Towards Sustainable Education: The Need for “Communiversality”

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, Abdul Rashid Moten

The technological revolution has many positive effects including making life easier, connecting people, and helping economic development. However, it has also been responsible for social isolation, mental health problems, and increased concerns around privacy and security. Evidently, the digital revolution, despite many changes in people’s life, is not sustainable and not equitable. To ensure global digital economy to be equitable, it is essential for educational institutions to come up with new rules and regulations, produce upskilled workers, and encourage a balanced approach to life that incorporates both technology and spiritual practices. compassion, love, and respect. The emphasis on Sustainable Development Goals is important but it should be given due emphasis by making education reach to the entire community. This necessitates establishing communiversality and is currently being practiced at the International Islamic University Malaysia.

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## Reframing Sustainability Learning – From net-zero to net-positive

Robert J. Didham

In this commentary, the idea of a stronger focus on a net-positive learning perspective and a solutions-oriented approach in education for sustainable development is proposed as a means to uplift its transformative potential and support an accelerated effort towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A net-positive learning perspective in ESD moves beyond a mitigation-based approach to achieving sustainable development and brings in focus a positive benefits approach – giving more than you take. It also acknowledges the importance of sustainable development as a form of immanent development that evolves through processes of negotiation, deliberation, and reframing, and aims to build the competence for this collaborative, values-based endeavour in learners and through engaged citizenship.

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## The Global Governance of Education for Sustainable Development: Cities as Critical Policy Spaces

Doo Rhee Lee, Imesha Ediriweera Patabendige, Jessie Wetherby, Maha Malik, and Laura Engel

This article examines the role of cities as critical spaces for advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) policies within global governance. Traditionally guided by national governments, education policy-making now involves diverse actors, including international organizations and local authorities. By analyzing ESD policies in Seoul (South Korea), San Jose (Costa Rica), and Washington, DC (United States), the research highlights the varied approaches of these cities: Seoul's centralized planning, San Jose's integration within broader frameworks, and Washington, DC's community-driven strategy. These cases demonstrate how distinct socio-political and environmental contexts shape each city's ESD strategies. The findings underscore cities as active policy spaces that both reflect and shape global sustainability agendas. The study calls for further exploration of the diverse actors involved in advancing ESD policies, as well as future research on the interactions between city-level and national-level policies, to better understand the complex, fragmented, and contested landscape of ESD initiatives shaped by both local and global dynamics.

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## Rethinking Learning Assessment in Education for Sustainable Development: A Call for Action

Daniel Fischer, Jordan King, Aaron Redman

The role of assessment in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is in need of re-assessment. Despite its importance, assessment in ESD has been criticized for its detrimental effects on learner wellbeing, lack of innovation, and failure to adequately consider fundamental sustainability principles, limiting its integral link to learning. A framework for ESD-sensitive assessments is proposed, considering the "WHAT", "HOW", "WHO", and "WHY" of assessment. This commentary argues that constructive alignment is needed not only between objectives, pedagogies and assessment, but also between these considerations of assessment and their alignment with general principles and aspirations of ESD. By rethinking assessment along these lines, and by grounding them in local contexts, ESD can contribute to its original task of reorienting quality education towards sustainable development. In light of this endeavor, the authors call for a more nuanced understanding of the purposes, methods, roles, and objectives of ESD learning assessment, and how they can be aligned to better support ESD principles and aspirations.

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## Getting Asian Teachers Climate-Ready: A Transformative Initiative in Teacher Education

Hiroki FUJII and Khalifatulloh FIEI'ARDH

This commentary explores the dynamic landscape of climate change education (CCE) in Asia, spotlighting the crucial role of integrating CCE into teacher training programs. It introduces the Asian Teacher Educators for Climate Change Education (ATECCE) Network, whose impactful initiatives have catalyzed change in teacher education and community engagement. A Japanese case study exemplifies the practical application of a Pan-Asian framework in embedding CCE into teacher education. The article aims to highlight the transformative power of teacher education in nurturing a generation equipped to address the climate crisis, underscoring the pivotal role educators play in shaping a sustainable future.

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## Promise of the Future: Commentary on education for sustainable development and international policy

William Gaudelli

This commentary explores Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and international policy, focusing on participatory decision-making, long-term planning, and education and awareness. Highlighting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7, which emphasizes sustainability, peace, gender equality, and human rights in education, the text underscores the importance of inclusive, youth-driven participation in policy development. Drawing from the Youth Declaration (2022) and recent UN forums/documents, the piece advocates for long-term, systems-based planning that addresses global challenges like climate change and generative AI. It emphasizes the need for educational literacy that transcends technical skills, fostering critical engagement with global systems and interdependencies. ESD's goal is to promote meaningful action, empowering individuals to contribute to a sustainable and equitable future.

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## Analyzing the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) from national to school levels through bibliometric studies

Tomonori ICHINOSE

This study utilizes literature databases and correspondence between UNESCO and Japan to clarify the effectiveness of implementing UNESCO's recommendations for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and examines Japan's domestic educational policy. After the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) ended in 2014, a noticeable decrease in references to ESD within the databases was observed. However, with the launch of

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, a noticeable pivot toward promoting sustainable development via ESD and global citizenship education (GCED) has occurred in Japan. This shift suggests that the SDGs act as an inclusive framework that effectively incorporates both GCED and ESD. With the recognition of the SDGs from 2015 onward, problem-based research in the Integrated Study periods focused on the 17 SDG goals became widespread in public schools, further accelerating the integration of sustainability concepts into mainstream education.

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## The Centrality of SD/ESD Policy, Practice and Change-Oriented Methodological Approaches to Human and Global Development

Adesuwa Vanessa Agbedahin

This article contributes to the scholarship on integrating education for sustainable development (ESD) into global development frameworks, which emerges from the need to investigate and propose solutions to enrich and enhance the nexus between policy and practice. The article responds to two of the four guiding questions of this special issue, (1) How does the field of ESD align or misalign with global development objectives? and (2) What kind of education do we need to address the pressing challenges of the twenty-first century? This article argues for the centrality of sustainable development/ESD policy, practice and change-oriented methodological approaches to human and global development. It presents five examples of generative and analytical change-oriented methodological approaches. These include 1) Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and the associated expansive learning; 2) Social learning; 3) Position-practice systems; 4) Social morphogenesis, and 5) Laminated system. It argues that these can propel learning, practice, and change processes and tackle context-dependent and cross-cutting human, global, environmental, and sustainability issues and risks supported by policy. They also have the potential to help develop an in-depth understanding of individual and collective SD/ESD change-oriented learning and change processes towards a more sustainable human and global development.

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## Promoting an enhanced learning about environment through a whole school approach and non-formal education tools: a case study of GREEN Olympiad

Livleen K Kahlon, Taru Mehta, Monmi Barua, Saltanat M Kazi, Ravi S Das, Kashish Bhushan

Holistic education empowers learners' with a transformative impact and improves their living conditions by enhancing their core competencies. A project-based learning approach helps to further facilitate environment improvement initiatives at an individual and institution level through

a whole school approach, ensuring sustainability and contributing to measurable results. GREEN Olympiad is a step in this direction and an example of a programme transcending towards Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) goals. This programme focuses on inspiring the school fraternity to incorporate various aspects of 'environment and sustainable development' into their curriculum through an instructional mode. GREEN Olympiad is a leading environmental education initiative of TERI that has completed 25 years since its inception. The importance of organizing Olympiads is also articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) introduced in India in the year 2020. Olympiads are seen as a medium to minimize rote learning and encourage holistic development and enhance 21st century skills. This is the premier Olympiad on environment in India and draws its linkages with the Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 7 (SDG 4.7) which states, 'ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' by 2030.

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## Integrating critical thinking about sustainable development goals: Making biodiversity matter for business students

Dr. Helen Kopnina, Dr. Teresa Roca, Professor M. Karim Sorour

Biodiversity decline and habitat destruction have drastically accelerated in recent decades, as reported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Increasingly, national, and international legislation mandates that businesses report and manage the potential effects of their operations on biodiversity. Despite recent advancements in addressing environmental issues in business school curricula, there is a gap in the scholarship linking business education to biodiversity crises. What kind of education can address the pressing challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly the sixth extinction? Challenging prevailing human-centred (anthropocentric) norms in Education for Sustainable Development Goals (ESDGs), we argue that business education needs a transformative shift towards ecology-centred (eco-centric) eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy to educate responsible corporate leaders. This paper contributes to scholarship on sustainability education by highlighting the need to reorientate business schools to embrace curriculum and pedagogy that support biodiversity conservation. The article is poised to enhance global policy discussions related to the 2024 UN Summit of the Future and beyond.

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## Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge for Education for Sustainable Development

Jun Morohashi, Julia Heiss, Mark Manns, Leila Loupis

In an era of environmental and social crises, integrating Indigenous knowledge into Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is critical for fostering a holistic, inclusive, and effective approach to sustainability. This article explores the essential role of Indigenous knowledge in contextualizing education, highlighting its contributions to sustainable resource management, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. Historically marginalized, Indigenous wisdom offers practical solutions for contemporary global challenges, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. By valuing and incorporating Indigenous perspectives into educational frameworks, education stakeholders can create more robust and culturally relevant learning experiences that empower communities and promote social equity. Examples from various countries, including Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Peru and Canada, illustrate the transformative impact of blending Indigenous and scientific knowledge. The article argues for a paradigm shift in education, emphasizing the importance of respecting and utilizing Indigenous knowledge to achieve a more sustainable and just world for future generations.

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## Galvanising Education for Sustainable Development Practice through the Greening Education Partnership: Steering Green Schools Toward 2030 and Beyond

Pramod Kumar Sharma

The Greening Education Partnership (GEP) has emerged as an actionable initiative with four strategic pillars each having its measurable indicators. An outcome of the UN Secretary General's Transformative Education Summit, GEP sets ambitious targets for countries to be achieved by 2030. It has potential to fast pace the global educational agenda toward the integration of sustainability and climate literacy. This aligns well with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4.7.

Despite widespread international support, the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) has significant challenges. These include fragmented policy, insufficient political will, and diverse socio-economic challenges. The paper presents a SWOT of GEP and critically examines GEP and opportunities it presents to scale up ESD. Drawing insights from the Foundation for Environmental Education's (FEE) Eco-Schools programme, the paper discusses necessary areas to enable the whole-school approach that integrates sustainability across curricula, pedagogy, and community engagement, emphasizing local relevance and inclusivity. The varying readiness and resource availability across countries pose significant challenges to achieving the ambitious goals. The analysis identifies critical success factors, including sustained government commitment, resource mobilisation, strategic actions to scale

up the learning and experiences of stakeholders to enable transformative educational outcomes.

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## What If More Education Isn't the Answer? Beyond the Business-as-Usual Approach to SDGs

Iveta Silova, Jeremy Rappleye, and Hikaru Komatsu

As the world approaches the 2030 deadline, the promise of education in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains unfulfilled, while the dominant educational models prevail without critical scrutiny. Our analysis dives into the SDG targets and their portrayals in seminal reports from UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Bank, revealing the heavy hand of these international bodies in shaping the global education trajectory. The evidence suggests that these influential bodies often perpetuate a business-as-usual approach in education, continuing to idolize economic growth and social equity, while relegating environmental concerns to the back burner. This approach not only compromises our future survival, but also solidifies a global education agenda that may, inadvertently, be scripting the planet's peril. Focusing on the complex interplay between education and the sustainability agenda, our essay urges a cultural shift towards a more ecologically attuned approach in education response.

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## Transformative learning to address 21st century challenges: plotting a pathway from endorsing international frameworks to creating a new classroom reality

Margaret Sinclair

Member states of the UN and UNESCO have committed themselves to adopt education policies and curricula that help students address 21st century challenges, from climate change and conflict to gender inequality and misuse of information channels. The 2023 UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development builds on the 2015 SDG Target 4.7. Effective implementation of international and national frameworks for this transformative learning requires political will, building the commitment and capacity of key actors, and reflecting 21st century issues in subject syllabi and school textbooks, as well as in high stakes examinations. A major constraint is the communication gap between those who sign the education policy commitments and those who can mobilise the needed financial support, e.g., for transformative textbook renewal. Integrating donors and financial authorities more closely into the planning process for transformative learning, both globally and at national levels, will constitute a vital step in bringing about more effective implementation.

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## Coming Down to Earth on Sustainable Futures and Higher Education

Noah W. Sobe

Universities have a vital role to play in any social pact for the future. For higher education to contribute to sustainable futures in which the ability of succeeding generations to chart their own flourishing futures is not compromised, a pivot is necessary. This commentary essay proposes that the changes needed to the university's inextricably overlapping teaching, research/knowledge-mobilization, and civic-social missions are a project of "coming down to earth" – both in the metaphorical sense of "getting real" about what higher education does and should be doing, and in the literal sense of recasting the sector's relationship to the natural world. The essay discusses the ways that employability, excellence, efficiency and entrepreneurship have become guiding principles for universities in recent decades. It argues that these can be retained, but only with a transformative pivot – a pivot that attends to embeddedness and belonging and has the higher education sector committing to land stewardship in a comprehensive and integrated way.

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## Truly transformative? Why ESD falls short in epochal times

Stephen Sterling

This reflective article argues that despite the widespread adoption of education for sustainable development (ESD) most manifestations of ESD are not sufficiently radical. They do not effectively nurture the kinds of social learning and societal shifts that international agencies agree are urgently needed to address current unsustainable socioeconomic pathways. Ten points are presented which offer a coherent appraisal and critique of ESD. An argument is presented that in conditions of polycrisis and a threatened future, much greater efforts should now be directed towards whole system change at all levels – truly transforming education policy and practice as a whole, so that it can in turn be transformative in effect. This shift needs to be based on the conscious adoption of an emergent ecological or relational worldview in order to transcend the persistent and narrowing effects of mechanistic, neoliberal and economic influences on educational thinking and practice. This emergent paradigm is life affirming and offers hope for the future.

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## Advancing Education for Sustainable Development and Roles of Higher Education Networks

Miki Sugimura

This paper clarifies the role of higher education networking in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The significance of ESD in higher education has been recognised since the 1990s. Globalisation and internationalisation emphasise the importance of creating partnerships through networking and international collaboration. Higher education



networks play a significant role in the development of ESD. This paper analyses three networks in Asia to compare the characteristics of networking and ESD in higher education. It also identifies the significance of networking in advancing the following aspects: the whole school/institution approach, the formation of a platform through partnership building, interdisciplinary educational research activities, and the sharing of knowledge. The networks include environmental education teachers, graduate schools for environmental studies in the Asia-Pacific region, and a university network that supports UNESCO-associated schools in Japan.

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## Transforming Knowledge and Research for Just and Sustainable Futures: Implications for higher education policy and practice

Leon Tikly

The article starts by making a case as to why it is necessary to transform knowledge and research. It is argued that transformation is essential for epistemic justice and to tackle the complex problems of unsustainable development. Higher Education (HE) has a crucial role given its pivotal position in knowledge generation, circulation and governance processes. However, the HE sector must be transformed to play such a role. The paper argues that the current neoliberal social imaginary based on markets and competition is antithetical to the required transformations. Instead, a new social imaginary based on Mbembe's idea of a new planetary consciousness is suggested to provide a more robust vision to base reform. The article discusses priorities for transforming teaching, research, global and civic engagement and how universities are governed. The article concludes by arguing that transformation must be considered holistically across these areas and that governments, civil society and multilateral organisations such as UNESCO also have a critical role in transforming the broader knowledge ecosystem HE currently operates.

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## Beyond National Frameworks: Five Critical Insights for ESD from Subnational and Urban Education Policy Studies.

Carine Verschueren

In international and comparative education, the unit of analysis has traditionally and predominantly been the national education system. However, many of these systems are or have become fragmented and decentralised. This commentary therefore presents five key insights from policy studies at the subnational and particularly at the urban level to understand the field of ESD. It uses three studies to support these takeaways: a study of the role of education in global cities' sustainability and climate action plans, a quantitative study of 200 school districts in the United States, and a comparative case study of three local school districts. Key insights include the involvement of cities in urban education policies, the focus on a whole institution approach driven by urban priorities, the inclusion of environmental justice, a more

participatory decision-making approach, and a focus on life-long learning to shift culture. While these somewhat align with the global discourse on ESD, they are more driven by local priorities and not yet systemic in their implementation.

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## Education for Sustainable Development: The Quest for Ubuntu

Yusef Waghid

Undeniably, education for sustainable development can justifiably be considered as a laudable educational practice because of its purpose to foster environmental awareness and responsibility, enhance economic sustainability, cultivate critical thinking and empowerment of people, and build inclusive societies (UN, 2017). In this article I tease out three policy perspectives on education for sustainable development in the quest to cultivate a more tenable notion of higher education specifically related to the African context. Firstly, I argue that any idea of African higher education ought to be constituted by a defensible philosophy of ubuntu. Secondly, I show that an African philosophy of higher education, that is, ubuntu, invariably connects with the enactment of sustainable development through the manifestation of democratic citizenship. Thirdly, I argue that an African philosophy of higher education (ubuntu) remains resistant to forms of injustice, inhumanity and exclusion that might ensue.

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## Empowering Youth-led Innovation to Accelerate Sustainable Development

Wendy Purcell, Sumie Song, Matthew Witenstein, Wen-Wen Tung, Radhika Iyengar

This paper seeks to reconceptualize education for sustainable development (ESD) with the explicit inclusion of innovation. Drawing on policy dialogues held over the past three years, including those at COP28, a Theory-of-Change framework for youth-led innovation is proposed. Some of the key barriers faced by youth in the pursuit of green innovation are identified and possible solutions proposed. Global examples of action-oriented, citizenry-focused projects serve to illustrate the range and scope of ESD-led innovation focused on youth with radical collaboration among stakeholders connecting global policy aims for sustainable development with local practice-based innovation. While some innovation hubs do include youth-oriented engagement activities, genuine partnerships between young innovators and established organizations involved with innovation are not well developed. At a policy level, it is held that there is a need to initiate and strengthen such partnerships between youth and private sector actors. Policy in this domain should also reference targeted mentorship focused on connecting young innovators with experienced advisors and professionals across established businesses, industries, government, and civil society organizations involved in innovation. As such, policy needs to embrace the integration of innovation with ESD curricula at all levels to enhance education and awareness about sustainability issues and the novel actions needed to progress sustainable development.

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