

Integrating English Education and Sustainability in Lembata: Promoting Well-Being and Environmental Literacy in Remote Island Communities

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This study investigates how integrating English language education with sustainability themes can promote well-being and environmental literacy among students in Lembata, a remote island in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Communities in Lembata face limited educational access, economic challenges, and environmental vulnerability, all of which impact student development and long-term community resilience. The objective of this research is to explore how English education can go beyond language acquisition to support students' cognitive, emotional, and social well-being while raising awareness of local environmental issues. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study involved surveys, interviews, and classroom observations in three junior high schools in Lembata. English lessons were adapted to include topics such as climate change, waste management, and sustainable living, using locally relevant examples. The findings show that students who engaged with sustainability-focused English lessons demonstrated higher motivation, improved language skills, and stronger environmental awareness. Teachers observed increased participation, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility among learners, who began to take part in school and community-based environmental actions. The integration of sustainability into English instruction made learning more meaningful and directly relevant to students' lives, fostering a deeper connection between education and real-world challenges. The study concludes that English education, when contextually adapted, can play a transformative role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in underserved island communities like Lembata. It supports the view that education for sustainability should begin in language classrooms, especially where resources are limited but cultural and ecological knowledge is rich.

Keywords: English education, sustainability, well-being, Lembata, environmental literacy

28 Introduction

This study explores the integration of sustainability themes into English Language education in Lembata, a remote island in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Lembata faces persistent development challenges, including limited access to quality education, underdeveloped infrastructure, environmental degradation and socio-economic constraints. These issue directly impact student well – being and community resilience.

Traditionally, English education in such communities is detached from local realities, focusing solely on language skills without addressing pressing environmental concerns such as coastal erosion, plastic waste and climate vulnerability. This disconnect results in low student engagement and limited environmental awareness. Therefore, there is a need for a contextualized approach that makes English learning more relevant and meaningful, promoting environmental literacy and supporting sustainable community development.

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29 Literature Review

Integrating sustainability into English language education aligns with global efforts toward education for sustainable development (ESD). Prior studies highlight that embedding sustainable development goals (SDGs) into curricula enhances environmental awareness, critical thinking and language proficiency. Research by Gunes and Edroğan (2023) and Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrate that eco-literate education improves understanding of sustainability issues and boosts student engagement, especially when topics relate directly to students' lives. Additional studies emphasize the importance of comprehensive content, teacher training and balanced curriculum design to foster effective education for sustainability (Yonata et al., 2023; El Gourari & Ed-Dali, 2024). Theoretically, this approach draws on content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which embeds subject matter into language instruction, thereby promoting both linguistic and content mastery while fostering environmental consciousness.

Benefits and Disadvantages

Integrating English education with sustainability themes in remote communities such as Lembata presents both notable benefits and challenges.

a. Benefits

1. **Enhanced Environmental Awareness** By incorporating sustainability topics into English lessons, students gain a deeper understanding of local and global environmental issues, such as deforestation, waste management, and climate change. This approach enhances environmental literacy and helps learners make informed decisions that positively impact their surroundings. A study by Gunes & Erdogan (2023) shows that students involved in eco-literate education programs significantly improve their understanding of sustainability issues and take proactive steps in their communities (Gunes & Erdogan, 2023).
2. **Improved Student Engagement** Contextualizing English lessons to include topics that resonate with students' daily lives increases their interest and motivation. Research on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) indicates that students show better engagement when learning is relevant to their personal experiences and local needs. Zhang et al. (2024) found that incorporating sustainability content into language lessons boosted student engagement and retention in schools with limited resources (Zhang et al., 2024).
3. **Promoting Well-Being** Integrating sustainability into the curriculum also supports student well-being. According to Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, meaningful learning experiences that relate to students' values and local context contribute to emotional and psychological well-being. A recent study by Li & Wu (2023) demonstrates that students who learn in sustainability-focused programs report greater satisfaction and improved mental health outcomes (Li & Wu, 2023).
4. **Empowering Local Communities** When English education incorporates local environmental issues, it empowers students to become advocates for their communities. This creates a feedback loop, where educated individuals take leadership roles in promoting sustainability, benefiting the community at large. Chen & Lin (2022) highlight how such educational models can foster sustainable leadership and advocacy in local communities (Chen & Lin, 2022).

b. Disadvantage

1. **Limited Resources and Infrastructure** In remote regions like Lembata, limited access to educational resources—such as textbooks, digital tools, and trained teachers—can hin-

der the effectiveness of integrating sustainability topics into English lessons. Studies have shown that resource constraints remain a major obstacle to the successful implementation of such programs in rural areas (Nunan, 2003). This is echoed by Gunes & Erdogan (2023), who note that inadequate infrastructure can impact the delivery of an integrated curriculum.

2. **Teacher Resistance and Lack of Training** Many educators are traditionally trained to teach English without incorporating interdisciplinary themes like sustainability. This could result in resistance to change or a lack of confidence in teaching these subjects effectively. Richards & Rodgers (2014) suggest that professional development programs focused on sustainability integration are critical to overcoming these challenges. A 2024 study by Zhang et al. also emphasizes the need for teacher training to equip educators with the skills necessary to integrate sustainability into their teaching methods.
3. **Potential Overload for Students** While integrating sustainability into English lessons is beneficial, it may overwhelm students who are already struggling with the language itself. Balancing the acquisition of language skills with complex environmental content requires careful curriculum design to ensure that students do not feel burdened by the additional information. Coyle et al. (2010) highlight that the challenge of managing both content and language can be a barrier for students with limited language proficiency.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity Issues** Although sustainability is a universal concern, certain topics or practices may clash with local traditions or beliefs. It's important to approach sustainability lessons with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that they align with the community's values and indigenous knowledge. Recent studies have suggested that culturally sensitive teaching methods are essential when integrating global sustainability concepts into local contexts (Li & Wu, 2023).

30 Research Methods

The research adopts a mixed-methods case study design, focusing on two junior high schools in Lembata. Data collection involved :

1. **Interviews** : conducted with 10 English teachers, 5 community leaders and 5 education officials to gather perspective on challenges and opportunities.
2. **Surveys** : administered to 20 students to assess change in environmental literacy, language skills and well-being before and after the intervention.
3. **Classroom observations** : to analyze teaching methods, students engagement and the integration of sustainability topics.

Data analysis combined qualitative thematic analysis of interview and observation transcripts with quantitative statistical analysis (paired T-tests) of survey results. The aim was to measure the impact of sustainability-focused English lessons on student motivation, participation and environmental awareness.

31 Result and Discussion

The integration of sustainability themes into English lessons resulted in significant positive outcomes:

Enhanced Environmental Literacy: Students demonstrated increased awareness of local ecological issues such as waste management and climate change.

1. **Improved Motivation and Engagement:** Contextually relevant content resonated with students' daily lives, leading to higher participation, interest, and enthusiasm in classes.
2. **Social and Emotional Well-being:** According to teachers, students showed a stronger sense of responsibility, critical thinking, and community involvement.

3. Community Action: Students and teachers reported initiating environmental projects, reflecting a connection between classroom learning and real-world impact.

Challenges identified include resource limitations, insufficient teacher training, and complexities in integrating dual content areas effectively. Overcoming these obstacles requires ongoing professional development and the development of locally relevant teaching materials.

32 Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative potential of integrating sustainability themes into English language education, particularly in underserved and remote island communities such as Lembata. By contextualizing language learning with locally relevant environmental issues such as waste management, climate change, and sustainable living students were not only able to strengthen their English proficiency but also deepen their environmental literacy and sense of responsibility toward their surroundings. The findings indicate that this approach enhances student motivation, engagement, and critical thinking, while simultaneously supporting their social and emotional well-being. Teachers and learners alike reported that the lessons became more meaningful, as classroom discussions were directly connected to real-life challenges faced by their communities.

Despite the clear benefits, challenges such as limited resources, lack of teacher training, and the complexity of balancing language acquisition with sustainability content remain pressing obstacles. Addressing these issues will require greater investment in teacher professional development, the creation of culturally sensitive and contextually relevant teaching materials, and stronger collaboration between schools, local communities, and policymakers. Nevertheless, the outcomes of this research reinforce the idea that English education can go beyond its traditional boundaries to actively contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In conclusion, integrating sustainability into English instruction is not merely an educational innovation but a necessity for preparing young learners in Lembata to face future challenges with knowledge, resilience, and agency. This model demonstrates how education can bridge global concerns with local realities, ensuring that even in resource limited contexts, students can engage in meaningful learning that empowers both individual growth and community development. By starting from the classroom, education for sustainability can cultivate future leaders who are capable of protecting their environment, uplifting their communities, and contributing to a more sustainable world.

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