

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Competencies in Business and Sustainability: A Transformative Approach Using a Real-Life Teaching Case

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Abstract:

The coronavirus pandemic alarmingly reminds us of the ongoing environmental and social-economic crisis which is threatening the future of the world. This urgently calls for new forms of education to develop the future generation's vision of a sustainable world which will depend on environmental integrity, social justice, and economic prosperity. Goal 4 of the United Nation Sustainability Development Goals (UN SDGs) sets a target of quality education: by 2030 'all learners will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development'. However, the findings of the Sustainable Literacy Test (Sulitest) report suggest SDG4 stands at 57%. The challenges addressed by this specific SDG need to be tackled urgently in terms of education and awareness (Sulitest, 2017). This paper develops an innovative framework to address challenges facing Education for Sustainability Development in the business and management discipline. We argue for a particular pedagogical approach using real-life teaching cases as a tool to transform the business curriculum so that it can effectively build students' literacy in business and sustainability.

Paper:

Sustainability Education is often referred to as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which has been defined as: "*Education for Sustainable Development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future*" (UNESCO, 2014). ESD aims to foster competencies - skills, attributes and values - and how they link to all disciplines and knowledge for sustainable development, required by the current and future society and economy. To be more specific, ESD equips learners who are the current and future decision-makers of the world with skills to make informed and forward-looking decisions to build a sustainable future. ESD is also related to local policy and mandate. For example, the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Advance Higher Education (AdvanceHE) published Education for Sustainable Development Guidance (ESDG, 2021) which is intended to help UK higher education institutions incorporate ESD within their curricula to address the UN SDGs. Over the years, overarching and general sustainability competencies have been researched, articulated, and evaluated by scholars in the field (see Wiek et al. 2011, 2016; Warren, 2014; Brundiers et al 2021). It is generally agreed that the key sustainability competencies include systems thinking, futures thinking, values thinking, strategic thinking, and collaboration competence. Wiek et al. (2016 p. 243) also defined a sixth 'integrated competence' which is the 'meta-competence of meaningfully using and integrating the

five key competencies for solving sustainability problems and fostering sustainable development”.

In this paper, we focus on how to foster competencies that are characterized by the unique role they play in addressing the sustainability challenges and opportunities. ESD advocates educators to use active pedagogies where learners identify solutions which consider environmental integrity, social justice and economic prosperity in a holistic system (AdvanceHE, 2021). It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. ESD consequently promotes competencies such as critical thinking, forward-looking and making decisions in a collaborative and systematic way.

The aim of this paper is to develop an innovative framework to address challenges facing EDS in the business and management discipline and to propose the use of a real-life teaching case as a tool to effectively build students' literacy in business and sustainability. Recent literature suggest the use of case studies is in the way in which they expose students to real-world complexity, particularly with respect to decision-making and problem-solving (Weil et al. 2010). However, it is still ambiguous if or to what extent that teaching case is effective in promoting ESD. In order to understand the main issues and possible pedagogies which can be used to develop ESD, we critically review the literature around:

- Drivers and barriers for education for sustainability development
- Sustainability competencies
- Sustainability literacy and employability
- Pedagogy in sustainability and sustainability in curriculum
- Design and Pedagogical benefits of using real-life teaching case

Based on an extensive literature review and consideration of academic practice, we are proposing an innovative framework deriving from Sterling (2011, 2012). This framework could transform the traditional business education to allow students to develop highly sought-after competencies in business and sustainability simultaneously without sacrificing the hard skills development (Figure 1). We propose a real-life teaching case can introduce students to a real social, environmental and economical context in which lecturers can deliver curriculum content to develop students' sustainability competencies. To develop such a case, the authors conducted a field research project with a UK-based premium snack maker who is fully committed to combatting the environmental crisis through achieving zero-carbon emission. Following this project, the authors developed a teaching case to embrace sustainability development in business and financial decision-making with the key sustainability competencies discussed above to be embedded throughout the case. The implementation of the teaching case in undergraduate business and management courses will be in multiple Business Schools in the UK. We adopt qualitative, focus group interviews followed by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to evaluate the usage of the teaching case and specifically to examine to what extent it helps to achieve sustainability competencies of business graduates.

The contribution of this paper is threefold:

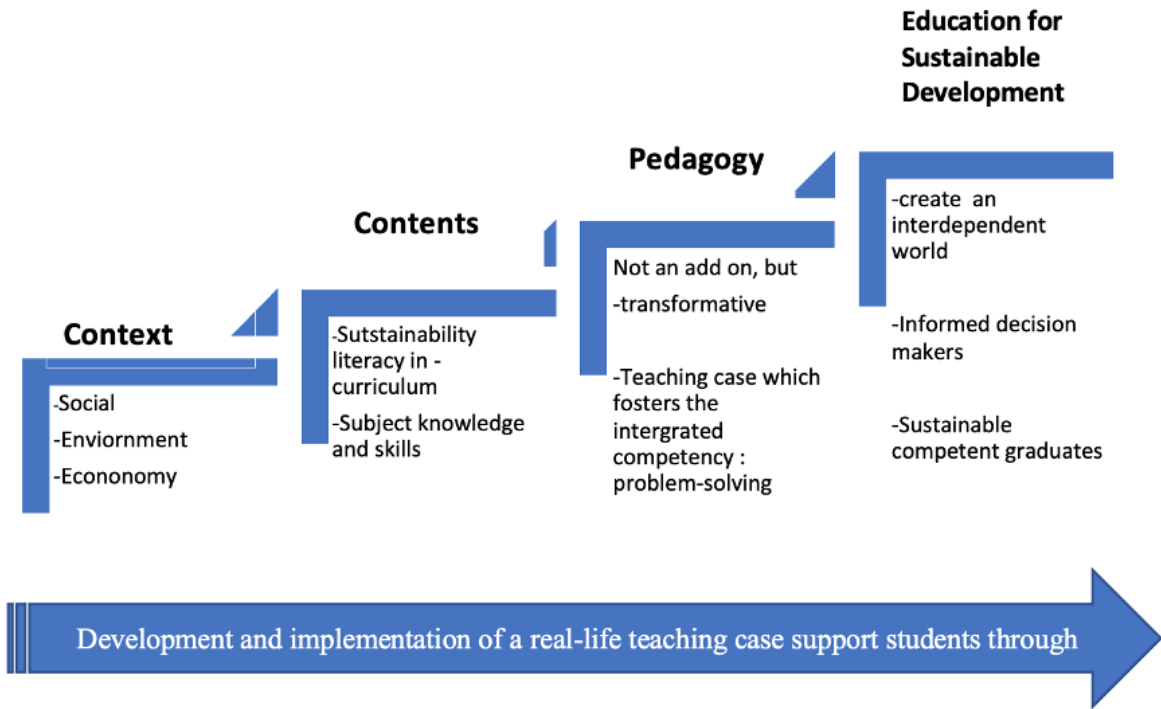
1. It is widely acknowledged that ESD needs to be tackled urgently. However, there is a lack of an explicit framework that educators in higher education can use. This paper proposes a universal framework which can be used in different disciplines.
2. It examines the effectiveness of developing sustainability competencies of business graduates when using a real-life teaching case.

3. The findings will be of interest to educators contemplating the use of teaching cases in their business and management programmes. This will achieve sustainability-based learning outcomes by highlighting potential benefits and pitfalls they may encounter.

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- **Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework**



- **Context:** social, environment and economy systematically related to each other (Powerful knowledge)
- **Contents:** competencies and literacy in business and sustainability
- **Pedagogic benefits of teaching with cases:** problem-solving competencies