

Integrating Sustainable Development Values into Indonesian Language Instruction in Higher Education



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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is a global agenda encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions, requiring active engagement from various sectors, including higher education. In this context, Indonesian language instruction at the university level is not only aimed at enhancing language skills but also serves as a medium to foster students' critical awareness of sustainability issues. This study aims to describe how sustainable development values are integrated into Indonesian language courses and to explore the pedagogical approaches and strategies employed by lecturers. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data collected through syllabus and course document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews with lecturers and students from various academic programs. Preliminary findings reveal that some lecturers have begun introducing sustainability-related themes such as environmental protection, social justice, and digital ethics through writing assignments, classroom discussions, and text analysis. However, the integration of these values remains unsystematic and largely dependent on individual lecturers' initiatives. These findings highlight the need for a structured instructional guideline to support the development of Indonesian language course materials aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strengthening this integration can position language education as a transformative space that not only builds linguistic competence but also equips students with critical thinking and solution-oriented perspectives needed to address future global challenges.

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan berkelanjutan merupakan agenda global yang mencakup dimensi sosial, ekonomi, dan lingkungan, serta menuntut keterlibatan aktif dari berbagai sektor, termasuk pendidikan tinggi. Dalam konteks ini, pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di perguruan tinggi tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penguatan keterampilan berbahasa, tetapi juga dapat menjadi sarana untuk membangun kesadaran kritis mahasiswa terhadap isu-isu keberlanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk integrasi nilai-nilai pembangunan berkelanjutan dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia serta pendekatan dan strategi yang digunakan dosen dalam pelaksanaannya. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui studi dokumentasi (silabus dan RPS), observasi kelas, serta wawancara dengan dosen dan mahasiswa dari berbagai program studi. Hasil awal menunjukkan bahwa sebagian dosen telah mengangkat tema-tema terkait keberlanjutan, seperti lingkungan hidup, keadilan sosial, dan etika digital, dalam tugas menulis, diskusi kelas, dan analisis teks. Namun, integrasi ini belum bersifat sistematis dan masih bergantung pada inisiatif individu dosen. Temuan ini mengindikasikan perlunya panduan pembelajaran yang secara eksplisit mengarahkan pengembangan materi Bahasa Indonesia berbasis nilai-nilai Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs). Dengan penguatan tersebut, pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia dapat berperan lebih signifikan dalam membentuk lulusan yang tidak hanya kompeten secara linguistik, tetapi juga sadar akan tantangan masa depan dan mampu berpikir solutif untuk keberlanjutan global.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognized as critical agents in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their contributions now extend well beyond conventional functions of instruction and research to include wider social responsibilities such as curriculum reform, collaborative knowledge production, and innovation explicitly oriented toward sustainability. As global crises including climate change, ecological degradation, and widening social inequalities intensify, universities are positioned not merely as sites of intellectual transmission but as transformative institutions capable of actively shaping pathways toward sustainable futures (Saleh & Adly, 2024; Mori et al., 2019; Chankseliani & McCowan,

2020). This expanded mandate has been reinforced through new international evaluative mechanisms, most prominently the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, which assess institutional contributions to the SDGs (Torabian, 2019; Tret'yakova & Kotomina, 2020). Such rankings not only incentivize the adoption of innovative practices but also cultivate a global culture of competition that places sustainability at the heart of institutional identity and reputation (Hansen et al., 2021). The dynamic in which HEIs are judged not solely on academic prestige but also on their demonstrable contributions to global well-being has dramatically reshaped expectations for the sector.

One of the most visible and impactful avenues through which HEIs engage the SDGs is the integration of sustainability principles into their curricula. Research demonstrates that embedding sustainability within academic programs strengthens learning outcomes, fosters interdisciplinary thinking, and cultivates civic responsibility among students (Phdungsilp, 2022; Vilches et al., 2021). Courses infused with sustainability themes enhance both academic development and student motivation by situating inquiry within meaningful real-world contexts (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020). At the institutional level, initiatives such as green campus policies, dedicated sustainability programs, and collaborative community projects reinforce commitments and provide experiential platforms for connecting theory to practice (Molokova, 2021; Lombardi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022). Importantly, universities also operate as hubs of community outreach and policy influence, enabling them to produce localized solutions to sustainability challenges while simultaneously contributing to broader global agendas. The Triple Helix Model, which emphasizes collaborative synergies among universities, industry, and government, illustrates this expanded role (Heryadi et al., 2018). Within such a framework, HEIs assume dual roles as producers of knowledge and as catalysts for sustainability-oriented innovation, effectively bridging research with societal application.

A crucial but often underexplored dimension of sustainability is language education. Language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a medium for constructing meaning, shaping identity, and enabling critical reflection on socio-environmental discourses. Scholars argue that aligning language education with sustainability equips learners to interrogate global inequities, ecological threats, and developmental paradigms (Ge et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2020; Horst & Pearce, 2010). Critical literacy, in particular, provides a pedagogical orientation that empowers learners to deconstruct dominant unsustainable narratives and to articulate counter-narratives grounded in justice and resilience (Bonyadi, 2019). In this light, language instruction transcends the acquisition of linguistic skills, transforming into a practice where communicative competence intersects with civic responsibility, ethical reasoning, and global citizenship. Integrating sustainability content into language curricula therefore ensures that students gain both functional linguistic proficiency and the critical, ethical sensibilities essential for navigating the complexities of the twenty-first century.

In the Indonesian context, the compulsory Indonesian language course at the tertiary level provides a strategic and highly visible platform for embedding sustainability. Traditionally oriented toward strengthening students' abilities in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the course has evolved to embrace broader educational objectives. Emerging pedagogical innovations demonstrate its potential to cultivate critical literacy, moral reasoning, and cultural identity (Mulyani et al., 2022; Alfia et al., 2022; Kusmanto et al., 2024). Project-based and experiential learning approaches enable students to apply language skills to real-world sustainability challenges, fostering creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving capacities that align with broader ESD objectives. The integration of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, has further diversified pedagogical practices, heightening engagement and enriching analytical capacity (Sugianti & Rosidah, 2024). Simultaneously, the infusion of character education foregrounds values such as integrity, respect, and social responsibility (Rabiah, 2019), reinforcing the dual mission of linguistic competence and civic formation. In this sense, the Indonesian language course is not only a means of fostering national identity but also a crucial arena for engaging global sustainability discourses.

Recent efforts to systematize sustainability integration into Indonesian language instruction have been guided by the Education for Sustainable Development (EfSD) framework. This international paradigm emphasizes equipping students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions conducive to sustainable futures (Jaenudin et al., 2023). Its practical applications within Indonesian language instruction include project-based assignments focused on environmental, social, and ethical issues, bridging classroom learning with direct community engagement. Equally, incorporating local wisdom and indigenous knowledge ensures that sustainability is contextualized within culturally resonant frameworks (Purnomo et al., 2022). Curricular materials that embed

Islamic ethical perspectives further demonstrate how contextual moral resources can enrich sustainability education (Readi, 2024). Collectively, these approaches embody culturally responsive pedagogy, aligning global imperatives with local contexts and fostering holistic competencies among students. Such innovations highlight the capacity of Indonesian language education to act as a powerful conduit for embedding sustainability in ways that resonate across cultural, ethical, and disciplinary boundaries.

Nevertheless, substantial barriers continue to constrain the comprehensive integration of sustainability into Indonesian language curricula. Existing studies underscore that incorporation remains sporadic, fragmented, and heavily reliant upon the initiative of individual lecturers rather than institutionally mandated frameworks (Dahl, 2019; Jing et al., 2022). As a result, implementation is uneven across faculties and institutions, lacking consistency or systematic direction. Moreover, the absence of coherent national guidelines and assessment frameworks relegates sustainability to a peripheral role rather than embedding it as a central curricular priority (Cardiff et al., 2024; Bekteshi & Khaferi, 2020). Many educators report insufficient training and limited confidence in embedding sustainability content, exacerbated by the lack of professional development opportunities (Redman et al., 2021). Without institutional support, ongoing capacity building, and structured policies, the potential of language education to serve as a driver of sustainability literacy is severely curtailed (Filho et al., 2019; Amaeshi et al., 2019). These challenges highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and policy-level interventions aimed at normalizing sustainability integration across the higher education curriculum.

This study seeks to address these lacunae by investigating current practices, pedagogical strategies, and constraints associated with integrating sustainability into Indonesian language instruction at the university level. It focuses on three guiding questions: (1) How are sustainability values embedded within Indonesian language courses? (2) What pedagogical approaches are employed by lecturers to advance these values? and (3) What barriers and enabling conditions shape the integration process? Addressing these questions allows for a comprehensive appraisal of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, and provides an empirical foundation for pedagogical and policy reform.

The anticipated contributions of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it bridges scholarship on Education for Sustainable Development and language pedagogy by foregrounding the mediating role of critical literacy. It thereby expands theoretical understandings of how language instruction functions not simply as a technical domain but as a vehicle of social transformation. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the development of structured instructional guidelines and policy recommendations, enabling lecturers to embed sustainability systematically rather than sporadically. Such guidelines would foster standardization across institutions, ensuring that all students acquire not only linguistic proficiency but also the critical, civic, and problem-solving capacities essential for addressing sustainability challenges. Ultimately, the research aspires to reposition Indonesian language education as a transformative pedagogical site capable of advancing both national educational priorities and global sustainability imperatives.

In conclusion, this introduction has situated the study within the global discourse on higher education's role in advancing the SDGs, underscored the often-overlooked potential of language and critical literacy in fostering sustainability, contextualized the Indonesian language course as a vital site of academic and moral formation, and identified structural barriers that hinder systematic integration. Against this backdrop, the study demonstrates that Indonesian language instruction holds significant, yet underutilized, potential to operate as a transformative educational arena. By simultaneously cultivating linguistic competence and preparing students to engage meaningfully with national and global sustainability agendas, Indonesian language instruction can be re-envisioned as a cornerstone of higher education's contribution to the SDGs.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which is considered the most appropriate for exploring the integration of sustainable development values into Indonesian language instruction in higher education. A qualitative descriptive design enables researchers to obtain rich, in-depth, and contextualized data about the experiences of lecturers and students while allowing participants' voices to emerge prominently (Eslit, 2023; Raskind et al., 2018). Although this method has limitations such as researcher subjectivity and limited generalizability, it remains relevant because the focus is on understanding processes rather than statistical measurement. Potential bias is minimized through triangulation and member checking, while resource limitations are addressed by narrowing the scope of the study to two higher education institutions in Garut City.

The research was conducted at two universities in Garut City: one health-oriented institution and one education-oriented institution. These sites were purposively selected to capture diverse contexts and enable comparisons between different institutional settings. This selection is consistent with Kuusalu et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of local contexts in studies of sustainability integration. The contrasting characteristics of the two institutions—particularly in terms of discipline, curriculum, and educational orientation—are expected to enrich the study's findings.

The participants include three categories. First, lecturers teaching Indonesian language courses (approximately 5–10 individuals) were chosen for their direct involvement in designing and implementing instruction. Second, undergraduate students from various faculties (around 30–50 individuals) were included to gather diverse perspectives on learning experiences. Third, official documents such as syllabi, course plans, teaching materials, and student assignments were analyzed as supplementary data sources. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that the selected participants were directly relevant to the study's objectives, following recommendations by Abdullah & Majid (2016) and Yulitriana (2022).

Data were collected using three main techniques. First, document analysis was conducted to evaluate the extent to which sustainability themes were integrated into objectives, content, and assessments. This method is supported by Gunina et al. (2021), who emphasize the value of documents as formal evidence of curriculum alignment with the SDGs. Second, classroom observations were carried out to directly observe pedagogical practices, interaction dynamics, and the application of critical literacy. Poudel (2022) noted that observations provide immediate insights into teaching practices, while Jodojin (2020) highlighted their importance in understanding the socio-cultural context of learning. Third, in-depth interviews with lecturers and students were used to explore personal perspectives regarding motivations, strategies, experiences, and challenges in integrating sustainability values. Madkur & As'Ad (2024) demonstrated that interviews can reveal dimensions not easily captured through observations or documents.

The research instruments were carefully designed to align with the study's objectives. Document analysis guidelines were based on SDG indicators and critical literacy principles (Gunina et al., 2021). Observation checklists included categories such as student engagement, critical dialogue, real-world application of course content, and diversity of perspectives (Riasari et al., 2021; Firdaus et al., 2024). Semi-structured interview guides featured open-ended, flexible, and thematic questions, tailored to sustainability-oriented teaching practices (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020; Enzelina et al., 2023). These instruments ensured consistency in data collection while allowing for depth and flexibility.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The process involved four key stages: data reduction, categorization and coding, data display, and conclusion drawing. During reduction, data from interviews, observations, and documents were sorted according to research categories. Next, data were coded with thematic labels such as environmental themes, social justice, digital ethics, and critical literacy practices (Phelan et al., 2025; Rodger & Stewart-Lord, 2020). Findings were then organized into matrices for easier interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns in sustainability integration, lecturers' pedagogical strategies, and barriers or opportunities. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in linking empirical data with critical literacy theory and the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework (Mahat, 2022; Fenuku, 2024).

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation and member checking were employed. Triangulation involved using multiple data sources (lecturers, students, documents) and methods (interviews, observations, document analysis), as practiced by Makasau et al. (2024) and Khofiyya et al. (2023). Member checking was carried out by presenting summaries of findings to participants for verification (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016). This process helped maintain consistency between the researcher's interpretations and participants' actual experiences.

Ethical principles were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, benefits, and potential risks, and were free to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by using pseudonyms and secure data storage (ala & Romania, 2019; Ghaderi et al., 2022). The dignity of participants was respected by fostering inclusive and equal interview environments, minimizing discomfort or pressure.

Overall, this research methodology provides a comprehensive framework for examining the integration of sustainable development values into Indonesian language instruction in higher education, specifically within two contrasting institutional contexts in Garut City. The combination of document analysis, classroom observations, and in-depth interviews, supported by thematic analysis and validated through triangulation, is expected to yield findings that are both rich and relevant. These findings may serve as a foundation for developing structured guidelines for SDG-based Indonesian language instruction, thereby contributing not only to academic scholarship

but also to practical efforts to strengthen the role of language education in advancing sustainable development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

This section presents the research findings on the integration of sustainable development values in Indonesian language instruction in higher education. This topic is important because Indonesian, as a compulsory subject, plays a strategic role in instilling critical awareness and sustainability values among students across disciplines, especially in health and education fields that demand ethical, social, and professional competencies. The following elaborates the main findings obtained from document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews with lecturers and students in line with the focus of the study.

1. Document Analysis

The analysis of syllabi, course outlines, and teaching materials in both universities indicates that the integration of sustainability values remains partial and supplementary. In the health-focused university, course documents featured topics related to environmental and public health issues, such as medical waste management, sanitation, and water pollution. Indicators included references to environmental health issues, relevance of materials to professional practice, and the introduction of healthy living concepts. However, these themes usually appeared as supporting content rather than as explicitly stated learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the education-focused university emphasized digital literacy and technological ethics, including discussions of plagiarism, academic responsibility, and misuse of social media. Indicators observed included emphasis on digital literacy skills, understanding of ethics in technology use, and academic awareness. Although aligned with SDGs, their connection was rarely explicitly stated in the curriculum. Overall, these findings reveal an initial awareness of the importance of sustainability integration, but no formal guidelines were yet in place to systematize it.

2. Classroom Observations

Classroom observations highlighted variations in pedagogical strategies used by lecturers. In the health-focused university, students were assigned to write essays about local water pollution and its impact on public health. Indicators observed included student engagement in discussion, ability to link issues to professional practice, and the quality of arguments presented. Students appeared enthusiastic, though discussions often leaned toward factual description. In contrast, in the education-focused university, lecturers used online news articles on social justice and digital literacy. Indicators observed included the intensity of student participation, willingness to share opinions, and ability to connect issues to daily life. The discussions were more interactive, with around 60% of students participating, although not all were active contributors.

To reinforce these findings, student participation levels can be visualized in the following chart:

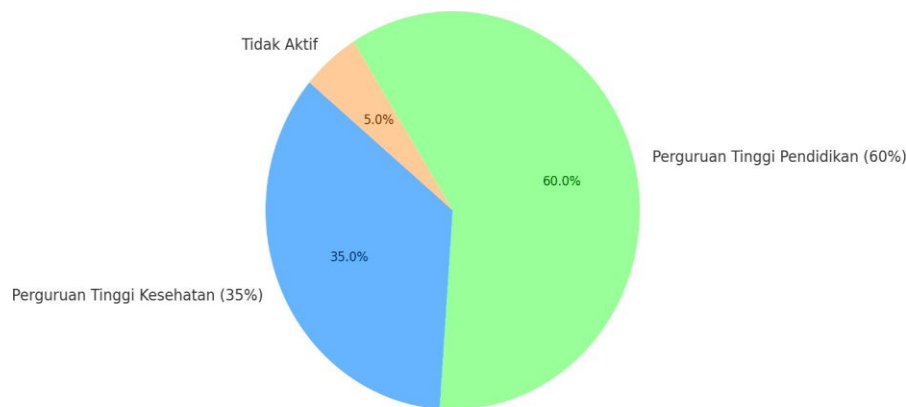


Figure 1. Student Participation Levels in Classroom Discussions

This visualization shows that students in the education-focused university were generally more active in discussions than those in the health-focused university. These differences may be influenced by the topics discussed, teaching styles, and academic cultures of each institution. The findings indicate that learning contexts and teaching methods significantly affect student participation levels.

3. Lecturer Interviews

In-depth interviews with lecturers yielded several findings. Indicators observed included motivations for integrating sustainability, challenges faced, and innovative strategies applied. The main motivation was to make learning relevant to real-world issues, thereby enhancing students' awareness of sustainability values. Challenges included limited references, absence of formal guidelines, lack of training, and restricted class time. Some lecturers attempted innovations through *project-based learning*, such as creating environmental campaign posters or simulating digital ethics discussions. A lecturer from the health-focused university noted, "*Integrating environmental themes is important because our students must understand the close relationship between public health and ecosystem conditions.*" Meanwhile, a lecturer from the education-focused university stated, "*Digital literacy and ethics are highly relevant because students interact with technology daily and must be aware of its social and academic implications.*". Further descriptions suggest that although lecturers focused on different aspects, they agreed that sustainability values reinforce students' academic character and social responsibility.

4. Student Interviews

Student interviews revealed several key indicators, including perceptions of material relevance, learning experiences, and consistency of sustainability integration. Students in the health-focused university reported that learning about environmental issues helped them understand the connection between their future professions and social responsibility. One health student said, "*Through writing assignments on water pollution, I realized that as a future health professional, I am responsible not only for patients but also for the environment in which they live.*" Additional descriptions show that most health students felt that writing and discussing environmental issues broadened their understanding of the relationship between individual health and ecosystem conditions.

Meanwhile, students in the education-focused university emphasized the importance of digital literacy and ethics, which they found highly relevant to daily life. One student noted, "*Discussions on digital ethics made me more careful in using social media and more aware of academic honesty.*" Further explanations revealed that education students believed these experiences developed a new awareness of their responsibilities as technology users in both academic and social contexts.

Some students in both institutions felt that sustainability content was not consistently integrated and often appeared only as an additional topic. They observed that integration largely depended on the creativity of lecturers, sometimes presented in depth and sometimes superficially. This led students to expect formal guidelines to ensure that sustainability becomes an essential component of Indonesian language instruction.

5. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis produced several main themes. Indicators included frequency of theme occurrence, depth of discussion, and interconnections between themes. Four dominant themes emerged: (1) *Environment*, covering pollution, medical waste, and environmental health issues. Data showed that 45% of health students identified environmental issues as most relevant to their learning; (2) *Social Justice*, reflected in news and opinion text analysis. Thirty percent of education students highlighted social inequality as a key topic that encouraged critical thinking;

(3) *Digital Ethics*, covering plagiarism, media literacy, and academic responsibility. Findings indicated that 55% of education students believed digital ethics discussions had a direct impact on their social media practices; and (4) *Critical Literacy*, referring to students' ability to interpret and question texts, though limited to 20% of students across both universities. These results suggest that despite institutional differences, the four themes form a foundation for students' understanding of the relationship between language learning and sustainability

6. Synthesis of Findings

The synthesis of findings employed indicators such as recurring patterns, consistency across data sources, and identification of challenges and opportunities. Overall, the study found that the integration of sustainability values into Indonesian language instruction in higher education had begun but remained inconsistent and largely dependent on individual lecturers. Best practices were observed in project-based and case-study learning. Key barriers included lack of institutional guidelines, limited lecturer training, insufficient references, and time constraints. Therefore, structured institutional policies are needed to ensure consistent and sustainable integration. Compared to international literature, this condition resembles findings in some European and Asian universities that also struggle with institutionalizing sustainability in language curricula. The main difference lies in policy support: internationally, institutional policies are often stronger, providing clearer guidance for lecturers. Practical implications include the need for universities to mandate sustainability integration in general education courses such as Indonesian language. Additionally, these results highlight opportunities for further research on cross-disciplinary project-based learning models that can enhance

both critical literacy and sustainability awareness among students.

To clarify the findings, the following table compares results from the health-focused and education-focused universities. It summarizes aspects of documents, classroom observations, lecturer interviews, student interviews, and key themes.

Table 1. Comparison of Critical Literacy and Sustainability Themes in Health- and Education-Focused Universities

Aspect	Health-focused University	Education-focused University
Documents	Environmental & health topics, SDGs not explicit	Digital literacy & ethics focus, SDGs implicit
Classroom Observation	Essays on environmental issues, factual discussions dominant	Case studies from news, more critical & active discussions
Lecturer Interviews	Motivation for relevance, limited references & time	Motivation for social relevance, lack of training
Student Interviews	More aware of profession–environment link	More aware of digital literacy & ethics
Main Themes	Environment, limited critical literacy	Social justice, digital ethics, critical literacy

This table highlights both differences and similarities between the two institutions, emphasizing the need for stronger institutional support to ensure consistent integration of sustainability values in Indonesian language instruction. The descriptions further illustrate that practices in health- and education-focused universities reflect distinct academic contexts while underscoring the need for systematic policies, continuous lecturer training, and measurable curriculum strategies. Thus, the table is not only a data summary but also a foundation for understanding the direction of sustainability-based Indonesian language curriculum development in the future.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide an in-depth perspective on the integration of sustainable development values into Indonesian language instruction in higher education. These results reveal both opportunities and limitations, which can be more comprehensively understood when placed in relation to previous research and expert opinions. The implications of these findings highlight both alignments and divergences with the existing literature on language education, critical literacy, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). By comparing the results of this study with both international contexts and local experiences, a more holistic understanding emerges regarding the challenges and potential of language learning as a transformative space for sustainability.

This research affirms that Indonesian language instruction is increasingly functioning as a medium for sustainability education. Students in the health-focused university were actively engaged with environmental themes, while students in the education-focused university concentrated more on digital ethics and social justice. This is consistent with Jaya et al. (2023), who emphasize that language teaching enhances students’ communicative abilities to participate in global sustainability discussions. Likewise, Mashudi (2021) highlights the effectiveness of project-based learning in fostering student creativity and engagement. The findings of this study confirm these perspectives, as lecturers implemented project-based tasks such as essay writing on water pollution and discussions on digital ethics, both of which promoted sustainability awareness. These results underscore the dual role of language teaching: building linguistic competence while cultivating social and environmental awareness. Higher education thus contributes directly to the achievement of the SDGs by embedding sustainability into curricula and pedagogy, even though the process remains far from systematic.

Classroom practices observed in this study reflect several aspects of ESD models identified in earlier literature. For example, contextual learning, in which environmental or digital issues are embedded into language instruction, aligns with frameworks that situate language within real-world sustainability contexts. Although blended learning models (Kurniawan) and problem-based learning approaches were not explicitly observed, elements of project-

based learning were clearly evident. Lecturers designed activities that required students to apply language skills to authentic issues, consistent with ESD principles that emphasize participatory and student-centered learning. This suggests that Indonesian language instruction is beginning to align with ESD frameworks, though integration remains inconsistent and largely dependent on individual lecturer initiative. Stronger institutional guidelines are needed to formalize these practices, including the development of thematic modules, the provision of contextual materials, and the explicit integration of SDG indicators into course documents.

Thematic analysis revealed that only 20% of students consistently demonstrated critical literacy skills, such as questioning authorship, examining ideological bias, and linking sustainability issues to everyday life. This finding supports Ge et al. (2023), who argue that language education must cultivate the capacity to critically analyze sustainability challenges. Tajhizi and Kizilkan (2024) also assert that integrating sustainability into language learning enhances students' self-perception as responsible global citizens. The present study supports this claim by showing that students became more aware of their professional and social responsibilities after engaging with sustainability-related texts. Moreover, Maijala et al. (2023) emphasize that project-based approaches strengthen critical thinking by bridging theory and practice. In this study, assignments such as essays on environmental issues and discussions of digital ethics provided students with opportunities to apply language skills to real-world sustainability challenges, thereby enhancing both literacy and awareness. These findings also indicate that critical literacy is not merely an academic skill but also a tool for shaping students' ethical and social consciousness.

Lecturers encountered challenges consistent with those reported in international research. Time constraints, limited resources, and a lack of institutional support emerged as major barriers. Hamid et al. (2025) note that sustainability discussions are often constrained by overcrowded curricula. Similarly, Maijala et al. (2023) observe that teaching materials frequently neglect sustainability themes, making it difficult for lecturers to design effective strategies. This study confirms such challenges, with lecturers reporting insufficient references, a lack of adequate training, and heavy workloads. Differences in student proficiency levels also posed difficulties, as noted by Kartini et al. (2024). Some students struggled to understand complex sustainability-related texts, preventing deeper discussion and often limiting dialogue to surface-level descriptions. Furthermore, Springinsfeld et al. (2025) emphasize the lack of institutional support for sustainability-focused teacher training, a point echoed in lecturer reports from this study. Together, these factors underscore the urgent need for stronger policy interventions to ensure consistent integration of sustainability into language teaching.

The findings also reveal both similarities and differences when compared with international experiences. In Sweden, Svalfors (2017) documented comprehensive curriculum integration of sustainability, while in Indonesia universities often rely heavily on lecturer discretion and creativity. Gregersen-Hermans (2021) highlights that project-based learning can enhance student responsibility and engagement with sustainability, but Indonesia still struggles to implement such methods in a structured manner. Furthermore, Dmochowski et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of multidisciplinary approaches, whereas in Indonesia, language education remains relatively isolated. These comparisons suggest that while Indonesian practices are moving in the right direction, structural reforms, policy support, and interdisciplinary collaboration are still urgently needed. Without such measures, sustainability integration will remain partial and dependent on individual initiative.

Experts agree that language teaching can function as a transformative space for sustainability education. Woźniak (2022) argues that language serves as a medium for fostering socio-cultural awareness while critically analyzing environmental issues. Dilber (2023) suggests that university language education should strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enabling students to address complex sustainability challenges. Gregersen-Hermans (2021) emphasizes that integrating sustainability values into education can shape graduates into socially responsible individuals oriented toward environmental ethics. The findings of this study align with these perspectives, as students reported greater awareness of their professional responsibilities (among health students) and digital ethical practices (among education students). This underscores the potential of Indonesian language classrooms as arenas of both social and intellectual transformation.

Overall, this study contributes to the body of literature that positions language education as an important part of sustainability efforts in higher education. Although Indonesian language teaching has begun to integrate sustainability values, implementation remains inconsistent and highly dependent on individual initiative. The findings confirm prior literature that highlights the role of critical literacy, project-based learning, and contextual approaches in linking language education with the SDGs. However, challenges such as resource limitations, curriculum pressures, and a lack of institutional support remain significant. Future efforts should focus on developing structured institutional policies, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and creating professional development programs that support the systematic integration of sustainability. With such measures, Indonesian

language courses can realize their potential as transformative spaces that not only cultivate linguistic competence and critical literacy but also foster sustainability awareness, social sensitivity, and students' ability to make meaningful contributions to addressing global challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the significance of applying qualitative methodologies in educational research as a means of deepening contextual understanding and enhancing methodological rigor. By integrating purposive sampling, document analysis, classroom observation, and in-depth interviews, the study has shown how multiple data sources can enrich findings and capture the complexities of educational practices. Triangulation and member checking further reinforce the reliability of the data, ensuring that interpretations are not only grounded in participants' perspectives but also validated through cross-verification. In this regard, the research provides clear evidence that qualitative methods are indispensable in exploring nuanced educational phenomena that cannot be fully captured through quantitative approaches alone. The use of thematic analysis and coding strategies also contributed to a systematic and comprehensive examination of data, enabling the identification of critical themes that are directly relevant to sustainability in education and the development of critical literacy skills among learners.

Furthermore, ethical considerations emerged as a central concern, highlighting the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants in maintaining the credibility and integrity of qualitative research. The findings emphasize that ethical research practices are not merely procedural requirements but essential elements that safeguard trust between researchers and participants while upholding academic integrity. Beyond methodological contributions, the study affirms that qualitative research has broader implications for education, particularly in aligning research practices with global goals such as sustainable development and the cultivation of critical literacy. By contextualizing research within these frameworks, qualitative approaches can provide meaningful insights that inform both theory and practice. Future research is therefore encouraged to build upon these methodological and ethical foundations, exploring diverse contexts to ensure that educational inquiry remains both locally relevant and globally impactful.

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