

**The Implementation of SDG-Oriented Projects in EFL Instruction: A
Descriptive Qualitative Review**

Kalayo Hasibuan¹, Reyziq Fadhila Akbar Damanik^{*2}, Bianca Aalya Frhsty³, Dewi
Sri Hafsah⁴

English Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training
State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia ^{1,2,3,4}

e-mail: kalayo@uin-suska.ac.id¹, 12310410535@students.uin-suska.ac.id

^{*2}, 12310423546@students.uin-suska.ac.id³, 12310421929@students.uin-suska.ac.id⁴

ABSTRAK

Integrasi Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (English as a Foreign Language / EFL) semakin mendapat perhatian sebagai bagian dari upaya mewujudkan pendidikan yang berorientasi pada keberlanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji implementasi proyek berorientasi SDGs dalam pembelajaran EFL, manfaat pedagogis yang dihasilkan, tantangan yang dihadapi, serta implikasinya terhadap praktik pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka. Data diperoleh dari artikel jurnal, buku, prosiding konferensi, dan dokumen resmi yang berkaitan dengan SDGs, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Project-Based Learning (PBL), dan pembelajaran EFL. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa proyek berorientasi SDGs umumnya diimplementasikan melalui Project-Based Learning (PBL), Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL), aktivitas pembelajaran kolaboratif, diskusi kelas, serta penggunaan materi ajar yang berorientasi pada keberlanjutan. Pendekatan tersebut berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan keterampilan berbahasa, kemampuan berpikir kritis, kesadaran global, kompetensi antarbudaya, literasi digital, dan tanggung jawab sosial peserta didik. Namun, implementasinya masih menghadapi berbagai kendala, seperti keterbatasan kesiapan guru, kurangnya sumber daya pembelajaran, hambatan teknologi, serta ketimpangan representasi tema keberlanjutan dalam materi ajar. Oleh karena itu, praktik pembelajaran yang kontekstual, pengembangan profesional guru, dan dukungan institusional

diperlukan untuk mendukung integrasi SDGs secara efektif dalam pembelajaran EFL.

Kata kunci: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pembelajaran EFL, Project-Based Learning (PBL), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), proyek berorientasi SDGs.

ABSTRACT

The integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has received growing attention as part of efforts to promote sustainability-oriented education. This study aims to examine the implementation of SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction, their pedagogical benefits, challenges, and implications for teaching practice. Employing a descriptive qualitative design through library research, the study analyzed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and official documents related to SDGs, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and EFL instruction. The findings reveal that SDG-oriented projects are primarily implemented through Project-Based Learning (PBL), Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL), collaborative learning activities, classroom discussions, and sustainability-oriented instructional materials. These approaches contribute to the development of students' language skills, critical thinking, global awareness, intercultural competence, digital literacy, and social responsibility. However, their implementation remains constrained by limited teacher preparedness, insufficient instructional resources, technological limitations, and the uneven representation of sustainability themes in learning materials. The study highlights the importance of contextualized learning practices, teacher professional development, and institutional support to facilitate the effective integration of SDGs into EFL instruction.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, EFL Instruction, Project-Based Learning, Education for Sustainable Development, SDG-Oriented Projects.

A. Introduction

The increasing complexity of global challenges, including climate change, poverty, social inequality, and environmental degradation, has intensified the need for educational systems to integrate sustainability-oriented values into learning processes. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals established by the United Nations in 2015 to address major global challenges and promote social, economic, and environmental sustainability by 2030 (UNESCO, 2019). The SDGs were developed as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to encourage global cooperation and collective action toward a more sustainable future. Within this framework, education is regarded as a fundamental instrument for supporting sustainable development through the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and sustainability awareness among learners (Tafese & Kopp, 2025).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has emerged as

one of the key educational approaches for supporting the achievement of the SDGs. According to UNESCO (2019), ESD aims to empower learners to make informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and social justice. Through ESD, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and decision-making skills that are essential for addressing contemporary global challenges. Consequently, sustainability education has increasingly been integrated across various disciplines, including language education.

In the context of language education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has significant potential to contribute to sustainability education because English functions as a medium for global communication and intercultural interaction. English language teaching also enables students to engage with global issues and develop intercultural understanding through meaningful classroom discussions and contextual learning activities (Wu & Shafait,

2024). Integrating sustainability-related topics into EFL instruction can therefore support the development of students' language proficiency, global awareness, and social responsibility (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020).

Previous studies have demonstrated that incorporating SDG-oriented content into EFL instruction contributes positively to students' critical awareness and understanding of global issues (Sofiana & Haryati, 2025). Sustainability-based learning activities also provide opportunities for students to connect language learning with authentic real-world contexts and meaningful educational experiences (Astawa et al., 2024). One of the most widely implemented approaches for integrating SDGs into EFL instruction is Project-Based Learning (PBL), which encourages students to engage in collaborative inquiry, contextual problem-solving, and experiential learning activities related to sustainability issues (Espino-Díaz et al., 2025). Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL) has also been identified as an effective strategy for integrating sustainability values and technology-based learning in English language education (Intan et al., 2025).

Despite the growing number of studies discussing SDGs in EFL instruction, the existing literature remains fragmented across different areas of focus, including textbook analysis, teacher perspectives, sustainability awareness, and digital learning. Several studies have examined the integration of sustainability topics into EFL textbooks and classroom instruction (Lasekan et al., 2023; Atika & Farida, 2026). Other studies have focused on teachers' perceptions and challenges in implementing sustainability-oriented learning in English classrooms (Kwee, 2021). However, studies specifically discussing the implementation of SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction, particularly regarding their pedagogical benefits and implementation challenges, remain limited. Therefore, further discussion regarding the implementation, benefits, and challenges of SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction is still needed.

This study aims to examine the implementation of SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction based on previous studies. The discussion focuses on the implementation of SDG-oriented projects, their

pedagogical benefits, and the challenges encountered during implementation.

B. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using library research to examine the implementation of SDG-oriented projects in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Descriptive qualitative research is used to analyze and interpret textual data in order to identify patterns and themes related to a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The study focused on previous research discussing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and sustainability-oriented practices in EFL classrooms.

The data sources consisted of journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and official documents obtained from open-access academic publications indexed in Google Scholar and other academic databases. The selected studies were published between 2020 and 2025, while several foundational references

published before 2020 were included to support the theoretical framework of the study. The literature selection was based on studies discussing SDGs in EFL instruction, project-based learning, sustainability-oriented activities, classroom implementation, and teacher perspectives related to sustainability education.

The data were collected through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, classifying, and reviewing relevant literature using keywords such as “SDGs in EFL,” “SDG-oriented projects,” “Project-Based Learning in EFL,” and “sustainability in English language teaching.” The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the implementation of SDG-oriented projects, their pedagogical benefits, and the challenges encountered during implementation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

C. Result and Discussion

Implementation of SDG-Oriented Projects in EFL Instruction

The findings from previous studies indicate that SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction are commonly

implemented through contextual and project-based learning activities. The integration of sustainability issues into English language learning enables students to connect language use with real-world social and environmental challenges (Cordova, 2024). This finding suggests that EFL instruction is increasingly directed not only toward language competence but also toward the development of global awareness, critical thinking, and social responsibility.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) emerged as one of the most widely implemented approaches in SDG-oriented EFL instruction. Previous studies revealed that project-based activities encourage students to participate actively in collaborative inquiry, problem-solving, presentations, and discussions related to sustainability issues (Espino-Díaz et al., 2025). The frequent use of PBL indicates that sustainability education is closely associated with contextual and student-centered learning practices. In addition, several studies emphasized the use of Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL), which integrates digital storytelling, multimedia presentations, and online sustainability campaigns into English

language learning (Intan et al., 2025). These approaches support not only language development but also digital literacy and collaborative learning skills.

Beyond project-based activities, SDG integration is also reflected in instructional materials and classroom discussions. Sustainability themes such as environmental protection, equality, health, and global citizenship have increasingly been incorporated into EFL teaching materials and classroom activities (Sofiana & Haryati, 2025). Textbook analysis studies also demonstrated that sustainability-related topics are represented in reading materials, collaborative tasks, and classroom discussions (Lasekan et al., 2023; Atika & Farida, 2026). However, environmental themes appear to receive greater emphasis than social and economic sustainability issues, indicating an imbalance in the representation of SDGs in instructional materials.

Pedagogical Benefits of SDG-Oriented Projects

The findings demonstrate that SDG-oriented projects contribute positively to students' language development, critical thinking, and sustainability

awareness. Sustainability-oriented learning activities provide opportunities for students to practice English through meaningful communication, collaborative discussion, and contextual problem-solving (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020). This suggests that SDG-oriented instruction can create more engaging and relevant learning experiences because students use English to discuss authentic global issues rather than isolated language exercises.

Several studies also reported that SDG-oriented projects improve students' global awareness and social responsibility. Integrating sustainability issues into EFL instruction encourages learners to examine environmental and social problems critically while developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship values (Wu & Shafait, 2024). Furthermore, project-based activities increase students' participation and motivation because the learning process is connected to real-world situations and collaborative interaction (Astawa et al., 2024). These findings indicate that SDG-oriented projects support both linguistic development and the

formation of critical and socially aware learners.

Challenges in Implementing SDG-Oriented Projects

Despite the various pedagogical benefits, the implementation of SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction also presents several challenges. Previous studies revealed that many teachers experience difficulties in integrating sustainability issues into English language teaching due to limited knowledge, insufficient training, and lack of instructional resources (Kwee, 2021). Some teachers also face challenges in balancing sustainability content with language learning objectives, particularly when students have different levels of English proficiency. Technological and institutional limitations also influence the effectiveness of SDG-oriented learning, especially in digital project-based activities. Limited access to digital facilities, inadequate technological support, and restricted classroom time may reduce the effectiveness of project implementation (Intan et al., 2025). In addition, several studies indicated that sustainability-related topics are often more focused on environmental

issues, while social and economic dimensions of the SDGs receive less attention (Lasekan et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the successful implementation of SDG-oriented projects requires adequate teacher preparation, balanced instructional materials, institutional support, and contextual learning resources.

Pedagogical Implications of SDG-Oriented Projects

The findings of this study suggest several pedagogical implications for the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into EFL instruction. First, SDG-oriented projects demonstrate that language learning can extend beyond the development of linguistic competence and serve as a platform for fostering sustainability awareness and global citizenship. The integration of sustainability issues into language learning enables students to engage with authentic social and environmental challenges while using English as a medium of communication. Such an approach aligns with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which emphasize the development of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to contribute to a

more sustainable future (UNESCO, 2019).

Another important implication concerns the role of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in promoting meaningful and contextualized learning. Previous studies have shown that project-based activities encourage students to participate actively in collaborative inquiry, critical reflection, and problem-solving related to sustainability issues (Espino-Díaz et al., 2025). By engaging in sustainability-oriented projects, students are not only required to use English for authentic communication but are also encouraged to connect classroom learning with real-life situations. This finding indicates that PBL can function as an effective pedagogical approach for integrating language learning objectives with sustainability education goals.

The findings also highlight the importance of developing global citizenship and intercultural competence through EFL instruction. As English serves as a global language, integrating SDG-related topics into classroom activities provides opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives and develop greater awareness of global

challenges. Wu and Shafait (2024) argued that intercultural communication and cultural awareness are central components of sustainable language education. Similarly, Cordova (2024) emphasized that sustainability-oriented learning encourages students to become more responsible global citizens by engaging critically with issues such as inequality, environmental degradation, and social justice. Therefore, SDG-oriented projects can contribute to the development of learners who are not only linguistically competent but also socially and culturally aware.

Furthermore, the implementation of SDG-oriented projects can support the development of students' digital literacy and learning motivation. The increasing use of Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL) demonstrates how technology can facilitate collaborative learning, creativity, and communication in sustainability-oriented classrooms (Intan et al., 2025). Through activities such as digital storytelling, multimedia presentations, and online campaigns, students are encouraged to use digital tools for meaningful purposes while developing English language skills. At the same time, contextual and project-

based learning activities have been found to increase student engagement and motivation because learners perceive the topics as relevant to their lives and future responsibilities (Astawa et al., 2024).

Despite these benefits, the findings indicate that the successful implementation of SDG-oriented projects depends largely on teacher preparedness and institutional support. Teachers are expected to possess not only language teaching expertise but also sufficient understanding of sustainability concepts and project-based instructional strategies. Kwee (2021) reported that many teachers encounter difficulties in integrating sustainability education due to limited training and insufficient instructional resources. Therefore, professional development programs, curriculum support, and access to sustainability-oriented teaching materials are essential for promoting the effective integration of SDGs into EFL instruction.

E. Conclusion

SDG-oriented projects in EFL instruction represent an innovative approach that integrates language

learning with sustainability education through project-based and contextual learning activities. The findings indicate that SDG-oriented learning is commonly implemented through Project-Based Learning (PBL), digital learning activities, collaborative tasks, and sustainability-oriented instructional materials. These approaches enable students to connect English language learning with real-world social and environmental issues. The study also shows that SDG-oriented projects contribute positively to students' language development, critical thinking, global awareness, and social responsibility. However, the implementation of sustainability-oriented learning still faces several challenges, including limited teacher preparedness, insufficient instructional resources, and technological constraints. Therefore, greater institutional support and contextualized learning materials are needed to support the effective integration of SDGs in EFL instruction.

REFERENCES

- Astawa, N. L. P. N. S. P., Santosa, M. H., Artini, L. P., & Nitiasih, P. K. (2024). Sustainable development goals in EFL students' learning: A systematic review. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 14(2), 1–11.
- Atika, A., & Farida, N. (2026). Representation of sustainable development goals in EFL textbooks.
- Bekteshi, E., & Xhaferi, B. (2020). Learning about sustainable development goals through English language teaching. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 5(3), 78–94.
- Cordova, M. (2024). Integrating sustainable development goals in English language and literature teaching. *Frontiers in Education*.
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Espino-Díaz, L., Luque-González, R., Fernández-Caminero, G., & Álvarez-Castillo, J. L. (2025). Exploring the impact of project-based learning on sustainable development goals awareness and university students' growth. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 14(1), 283–296.
- Intan, A. S., Fitri, N., Astika, Y. W., & Wismar, T. (2025). Digital project-based learning in English language education: Instrument for achieving sustainable development goals. *Jurnal Iqra'*, 10(1).

Kwee, C. T. T. (2021). I want to teach sustainable development in my English classroom: A case study of incorporating sustainable development goals in English teaching. *Sustainability*, 13(8), 4195.

Lasekan, O. A., Méndez-Alarcón, C. M., Mathew, B. S., & Campos, E. S. (2023). Exploring the potential of a popular EFL textbook to foster both sustainability awareness and competencies among ESD learners: A content analysis approach. *Sustainability*, 15(16), 12640.

Mambu, J. E. (2023). Embracing sustainable development goals critically to explore life purposes in English language teacher education. *TEFLIN Journal*, 34(2), 264–282.

Sofiana, I., & Haryati, Y. (2025). Incorporating SDG-oriented content into English language instruction in Indonesia: Advancing sustainable and critical language acquisition.

Tafese, M. B., & Kopp, E. (2025). Education for sustainable development: Analyzing research trends in higher education for sustainable development goals through bibliometric analysis. *Discover Sustainability*, 6, 51.

UNESCO. (2019). Framework for the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) beyond 2019. Paris: UNESCO.

Wu, S., & Shafait, Z. (2024). Assessing EFL (English as Foreign Language) education for sustainable development: Exploring the cultural

teaching literature. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 14, 2282–2299.