

Effective Education for Sustainable Development and Students' Self-perceived action Competency: Cross-section Study in Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the links between the effectiveness of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), through the transformative educational approaches “holism”, “pluralism” and “action-orientation”, on students’ self-perceived action competence for sustainability in higher education. The study uses fresh student survey data from across nine colleges in the UAE University. The main questions this project attempts to answer are: (1) To what extent ESD (holism, pluralism, and action-orientation) is applied across programs in the UAE university, (2) To what extent student’s sustainability beliefs are associated with their willingness to act and their actual participation (3) How different aspects of ESD practices and curricula is associated with different aspects of students’ action competence (knowledge of action possibilities, willingness to act and confidence in their own influence). Answering these questions will help policymakers in higher education to consider policies promoting teaching approaches required to accelerate achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We find that pluralism and action-orientation approaches, especially participation and collective learning, are significantly related to higher action-competency. Students’ sustainability beliefs were found to mediate the relationship between holism in sustainability education and learner’s self-perceived action-competency. This study contributes to the growing empirical literature on modern ESD approaches and models.

Keywords: Holism-Pluralism-Action-orientation models, Action competence, Effective teaching approaches for sustainability, learners’ sustainability beliefs, effective participation