

Chapter 1

Repositioning English Language Teaching for a Sustainable Future

Daniel Xerri
Aleksandra Popovski Golubovikj
Christopher Graham

Abstract

This introductory chapter outlines the conceptual foundations of *Sustainability in English Language Teaching* by situating ELT within the broader ecological, social, and educational challenges of the Anthropocene. It traces the field's recent evolution through key professional events that signal a growing recognition of ELT's responsibility to contribute to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Drawing on contemporary research in ecopedagogy, foreign language education, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the chapter argues that ELT is uniquely positioned to foster ecological literacy, criticality, intercultural competence, well-being, and learner agency. It also identifies the systemic, curricular, and professional challenges that constrain implementation, providing a way of understanding both the potential and the complexities of sustainability integration.

Keywords: Sustainability; Education for Sustainable Development; Ecopedagogy; Sustainable Development Goals; Critical Language Education

Introduction

The origins of *Sustainability in English Language Teaching* lie in a moment of collective recognition within the international ELT community: that language education must respond meaningfully to the accelerating ecological and social challenges of the Anthropocene. This recognition was the impetus behind the organisation of the ELT for Sustainability Conference, held in Sarajevo in 2024, where practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers gathered to articulate how ELT could contribute to a more just and sustainable world. The Sarajevo conference foregrounded the urgency of repositioning ELT as a discipline capable of fostering the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for planetary stewardship, opening a space for educators to reconsider the social purpose of language teaching beyond linguistic goals alone.

This momentum was strengthened a year later at the 14th ELT Malta Conference, whose theme, ‘ELT for a Sustainable World: Empowering Learners, Teachers, and Schools’, expanded the Sarajevo discussions into a broader call for systemic transformation. In Malta, sustainability was approached not merely as an add-on topic but as a framework for reimagining classroom practice, curriculum design, professional development, and institutional policy. Together, these conferences (and many other events)

signalled a paradigm shift: ELT increasingly recognises itself as a field with both the responsibility and the capacity to contribute substantively to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Research trends in the wider educational landscape reinforce this shift. Dağtaş (2025), through a large-scale bibliometric analysis of 374 Web of Science-indexed publications (2014–2024), shows that ecopedagogy has grown rapidly as a global research field, particularly after 2020, as educators respond to climate concerns and the UN's (n.d.) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ecopedagogy scholarship – traditionally dominated by countries such as Australia, the United States, and Canada – has generated robust work in areas including environmental education, sustainability education, place-based learning, and climate change. Yet Dağtaş (2025) highlights that this expanding field remains largely peripheral to ELT, despite the discipline's enormous potential to cultivate ecological literacy, critical awareness, and meaningful environmental action. This book directly responds to that call, situating ELT as an active contributor to ecopedagogical innovation.

Higher education scholarship echoes this reconceptualisation. de la Fuente (2023a) argues that universities must embed ESD across all disciplines and identifies foreign language programmes as uniquely positioned to take a leading role. Their inherent interdisciplinarity, cultural orientation, and focus on global communicative competence make language classrooms fertile ground for engaging learners with sustainability issues. de la Fuente (2023a)

calls for a rethinking of traditional divides and advocates for content-based, learner-centred pedagogies such as project-based language learning (PBL), problem-based learning (PBL), multiliteracies, and community engagement. These approaches allow language development and sustainability literacy to advance in tandem, positioning language education as a key actor in institutional sustainability agendas.

This broader reorientation resonates with the conceptual foundations of the SDGs themselves. Beasy et al. (2023) situate the SDGs within the context of escalating ecological and social crises, acknowledging both their value and their limitations, particularly their grounding in Western, growth-oriented models. Despite these tensions, the SDGs offer a globally recognised framework through which education can cultivate the critical understanding, hope, and transformative action needed to move toward human and planetary flourishing. Education, in both formal and informal modes, is indispensable for equipping learners with the capacities required to navigate and respond to these interconnected crises.

These developments underscore a pivotal shift in how ELT understands its role in the world. Conferences like the ones in Sarajevo and Malta as well as many other sustainability-oriented ELT initiatives across diverse global contexts have amplified practitioners' voices and energised new pedagogical directions, while research in ecopedagogy, sustainability, and language education points to an expanding consensus: ELT can and must contribute to building more sustainable futures. This book emerges

from that shared commitment, aiming to map the possibilities, challenges, and transformative potential of integrating sustainability into ELT.

As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, repositioning ELT for a sustainable future requires not only recognising these global shifts but also understanding their concrete pedagogical implications. Section 2 examines the wide-ranging benefits of integrating sustainability into English language education, highlighting how such work enhances linguistic proficiency, criticality, global citizenship, well-being, and learner agency. Section 3 then turns to the persistent challenges – curricular, discursive, institutional, and professional – that constrain meaningful implementation. By outlining both the promise and the complexity of sustainability-oriented ELT, this introductory chapter provides the conceptual foundation for the contributions overviewed in Section 4, each of which offers a distinct perspective on how the field can respond to the urgent demands of our time.

Benefits of Integrating Sustainability in English Language Education

The integration of sustainability issues into English language education represents a profound pedagogical shift, transforming the classroom into a space where linguistic mastery is inextricably linked to global awareness and responsible citizenship. This integration moves ELT programmes beyond their traditional focus on purely linguistic skills, recasting them as a dual-purpose pedagogy

capable of fostering both advanced language proficiency and essential sustainability competencies (Kumari, 2020; Usama & Tarai, 2024). Scholars such as de la Fuente (2023b) argue that sustainability provides the ideal ‘critical content’ for language courses, offering complex, real-world case studies that necessitate sophisticated linguistic and cognitive engagement. Furthermore, embedding the UN SDGs and ecocritical themes grounds language learning in a tangible and relevant context, significantly boosting intrinsic motivation and student engagement, which are key predictors of learning success (Kazazoglu, 2025; Usama & Tarai, 2024). This synergy of language acquisition and critical global content is best realised through action-oriented methodologies, such as PBL and PBL, which engage students in authentic, collaborative, inquiry-based work that culminates in meaningful outcomes (de la Fuente, 2023b; Ferry, 2023).

Enhanced Linguistic and Academic Proficiency

A primary benefit of integrating sustainability content is the demonstrable improvement in core academic and linguistic skills. Studies have consistently shown that an ecolinguistically enriched curriculum – featuring sustainability-themed texts, critical discourse analysis, and environmental tasks – can significantly improve English language proficiency and overall academic gains (Usama & Tarai, 2024). For instance, an experimental study by Rafiee Moghadam et al. (2022) found that integrating sustainability education into reading instruction improved both reading comprehension and empathy among young

EFL learners. The complex, interdisciplinary nature of sustainability topics requires students to engage with new and unfamiliar ecological terminology (Kazazoglu, 2025), which, with explicit vocabulary support, expands their lexicon and technical language use.

Moreover, the problem-solving tasks inherent in sustainability work demand the production of advanced, high-level linguistic forms. de la Fuente (2023b) highlights that structuring complex sustainability case studies pushes students to use more sophisticated language – such as hypothetical clauses, counterarguments, and nuanced persuasive language – as they engage in role-based debates and real-world decision-making. These activities provide a purpose-driven context for practising academic language that is often lacking in traditional curricula. By providing content that is universally relevant and intellectually demanding, sustainability-infused ELT fosters a dynamic learning environment where students use language as a tool for critical analysis and advocacy, leading to deeper, more durable linguistic competence (Kumari, 2020; Mondal & Khalid, 2025).

Development of Critical and Cognitive Competencies

The complexity of global environmental and social challenges requires a shift from linear to systems thinking, which is a core cognitive benefit of integrating sustainability into language learning (Ferry, 2023; Sun, 2025). Rather than simply learning about isolated facts, students use sustainability issues as a lens for critical thinking,

connecting causes, effects, and solutions across disciplinary boundaries. This approach transforms students into active meaning-makers and critical interpreters of the information they consume (Römhild, 2023).

Furthermore, sustainability education is a powerful vehicle for developing various multiliteracies. Römhild (2023) proposes a comprehensive framework for using eco-documentaries in ELT, arguing that these films, as multimodal, factional texts, simultaneously support environmental learning and the development of critical media and discourse literacies. Students learn to balance emotional engagement with critical analysis, enabling them to deconstruct the narratives and rhetorical strategies used in sustainability discourse. Similarly, Mambu (2023) shows that embedding the SDGs into an undergraduate ELT course fostered multidimensional criticality – linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, and philosophical – as students applied Marxist, poststructuralist, and decolonial lenses to global issues like poverty and environmental justice. The requirement for students to analyse real-world policy and propose solutions promotes superior problem-solving and real-world application of knowledge, preparing them for the complexities of adult life and global citizenship (Cordova, 2024; Davari et al., 2025).

Fostering Global Citizenship and Intercultural Competence

The global nature of sustainability issues makes their integration a natural pathway to Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and enhanced intercultural competence (Mondal &

Khalid, 2025; Römhild, 2023). By exploring climate change, social equity, or resource management, students are compelled to view these issues through cross-cultural lenses. Sun (2025), for example, demonstrates that integrating sustainability content alongside culturally embedded values significantly enhanced Chinese university students' intercultural competence when learning a foreign language. This approach moves beyond superficial cultural facts to foster a deeper understanding of how different cultures conceptualise and address shared global challenges.

The UN's SDGs provide a concrete, universally recognised framework for this process, allowing students to engage with topics such as poverty and gender inequality while simultaneously connecting these global issues to their own local contexts (Mambu, 2023). For instance, Xerri (2017) demonstrates how creativity-based ELT can meaningfully support SDG 4 (Quality Education) by engaging students with global and local inequities in education through imaginative, multimodal classroom activities. This global perspective strengthens social awareness and an understanding of global systems (Alcantud-Díaz & Lloret-Catalá, 2023; Xerri, 2025). Furthermore, Saiful and Shein (2025) found that ecocritical approaches to instruction, particularly those centred on ecosystem-spirituality, profoundly influence students' sense of connectedness to nature. By engaging with these diverse perspectives, learners develop the sophisticated communicative and mediation skills necessary to collaborate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries for a more just and sustainable world (Ferry, 2023).

Boosting Learner Affect, Motivation, and Well-Being

The emotional and psychological benefits of engaging with sustainability are increasingly recognised as a key pedagogical outcome, particularly in combating the rising prevalence of climate anxiety. Mondal and Khalid (2025) argue that Green ELT provides supportive spaces for reflection, hope, and action, actively helping to reduce this anxiety. By channelling feelings of fear or helplessness into constructive, solution-oriented projects, educators empower students and shift their perspective from passive consumers of news to active changemakers.

This action-oriented approach fuels intrinsic motivation, making the learning process more engaging and personal (Kazazoglu, 2025; Usama & Tarai, 2024). Students report feeling empowered to take initiative and apply their learning beyond the classroom, fostering personal accountability and a stronger sense of responsibility (Cordova, 2024; Davari et al., 2025). The learning also transcends academic boundaries to impact socio-emotional development. Rafiee Moghadam et al. (2022) demonstrate that sustainability-infused instruction leads to markedly higher empathy scores and pro-environmental behaviours. By promoting an ecocentric worldview, ELT can help students develop more caring attitudes and even move toward an ecocentric identity, strengthening their personal and collective well-being (Davari et al., 2025).

Empowering Agency and Action-Oriented Learning

Perhaps the most transformative benefit is the cultivation of learner agency, which is central to effective ESD. Integrating sustainability moves learning from passive reception of information to active, action-oriented learning (Cordova, 2024; Kumari, 2020). Methodologies like PBL combine language development with real-world, inquiry-based sustainability work, resulting in tangible public products that give students a voice and a platform (Ferry, 2023). Whether through climate-action campaigns, local clean-up initiatives, or role-based debates on policy, students are given a framework to effect change.

This empowerment is vital: by structuring complex case studies and using PBL, teachers guide students through a process that culminates in real-world decision-making, where their opinions matter (de la Fuente, 2023b). In a Philippine teacher education laboratory school, students who experienced SDG-infused lessons reported feeling empowered to apply learning beyond the classroom and advocated for a whole-school approach to sustainability, illustrating how this content catalyses systemic thinking and personal initiative (Cordova, 2024). Sustainability integration in ELT is designed to make students solution-oriented global citizens (Mondal & Khalid, 2025), equipped not only with the language to describe the world's problems but with the tools to actively participate in solving them.

Benefits for Teacher Development and Pedagogy

Finally, the integration of sustainability provides significant benefits for educators themselves, impacting both pre-service training and in-service professional identity. Studies show that embedding the SDGs into inquiry-based EFL teacher training courses significantly increases pre-service teachers' awareness of global issues and their readiness to integrate sustainability into future lessons (Alcantud-Díaz & Lloret-Catalá, 2023). By linking linguistic objectives with real-world concerns, novice teachers begin to see English not merely as a subject but as a tool for social change and interdisciplinary teaching.

For practising teachers, using environmental communication pedagogy makes language learning more tangible and relevant, which in turn strengthens their students' engagement and sense of responsibility (Davari et al., 2025). Teachers themselves report developing more ecocentric identities through this work, despite a lack of formal training, suggesting that the content is so impactful it can reshape the educator's professional self-concept. The process of integrating sustainability fosters a sense of personal accountability among teachers and empowers them to lead contextualised, interdisciplinary lessons, thereby enhancing pedagogical innovation within the field (Cordova, 2024; Davari et al., 2025). This mutual benefit underscores the holistic nature of sustainability integration, which simultaneously enriches the student experience, advances academic goals, and revitalises teaching practice.

Challenges of Integrating Sustainability Issues into Language Education

Despite the clear pedagogical benefits and the growing global mandate to integrate ESD into all disciplines, the field of ELT faces significant and persistent challenges in its practical implementation. These obstacles stem from systemic issues, curricular shortcomings, discursive limitations, and a critical gap in teacher preparedness, all of which constrain ELT's potential to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs. The current state of practice, as revealed by extensive research, is often characterised by well-meaning grassroots efforts from highly motivated teachers that frequently run up against institutional inertia and a lack of coherent policy (Mercer et al., 2023).

Curricular and Materials-Based Obstacles

A major category of challenge lies within the very materials and curricular design used in ELT globally. A pervasive issue identified by researchers is that, even when environmental issues are included, they often promote only shallow environmentalism and fail to cultivate genuine critical ecological literacy. For instance, an analysis of Brazilian EFL textbooks revealed that environmental texts – often repurposed photos, posters, and commercial articles – overwhelmingly originate from aesthetic or commercial spheres and offer minimal affordances for critical engagement or action (Cristovão et al., 2022). While these materials may raise basic eco-awareness, they leave students unprepared to interrogate the structural and root causes of environmental crises, thus limiting the development of

transformative sustainability-oriented behaviours (Cristovão et al., 2022).

This problem of superficiality is often compounded by a narrow framing of the issues. Studies of Indonesian textbooks, for example, show a heavy reliance on eco-lexicons connected almost exclusively to waste management (Pratolo et al., 2024). While essential, this narrow focus can exclude crucial social, economic, and political dimensions of sustainability, such as climate justice, poverty, or resource exploitation, leading to an incomplete and limited understanding of ESD (Arslan & Curle, 2024). This limitation also creates a risk of demotivation among students if the content is perceived as overly negative, repetitive, or solely focused on overwhelming global problems, necessitating a balance of content that includes local relevance and hopeful solutions (Davari et al., 2025).

Perhaps more insidious than outright omission is the hidden curriculum embedded in teaching materials, which often acts to normalise and valorise unsustainable practices (Brown, 2024). For instance, content analysis of teacher-produced materials in Japan found a frequent and routine valorisation of consumerism, mass tourism, urban lifestyle preferences, and meat-heavy food choices (Brown, 2024). These behaviours are typically presented as unmarked, everyday practices, implicitly teaching students to view them as normal and desirable, thereby undercutting explicit lessons on sustainability (Brown, 2024). That is why sustainability-oriented materials that encourage teachers and learners to question such behaviours and engage in greener practices are essential (e.g., Barber et al., 2022; Graham, 2022).

Practical challenges in curriculum design also exist. Scholars repeatedly identify issues such as the misalignment between sustainability content and explicit language objectives (CT & N, 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Teachers struggle to reconcile the demands of a standardised language curriculum with the interdisciplinary depth required by ESD. Compounding this, the reliance on centrally produced textbooks can often marginalise minority and tribal learners by privileging mainstream cultural content, thereby undermining the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability (Toppo & Rahman, 2021). This implies that to support cultural continuity and equity, teachers must be empowered to develop supplementary, locally grounded materials that reflect learners' diverse identities and lived realities (Toppo & Rahman, 2021). The underdeveloped status of sustainability within adjacent pedagogies, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), further exemplifies the gap in quality, structured materials (Penny & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2024). Hence, teachers require structured guidance related to materials development so as to integrate sustainability effectively while simultaneously supporting language development and learner agency.

Discursive Limitations and Criticality Deficits

A deeper, more critical challenge stems from the ideological framing and discourse present in many ELT materials, which often reflect and reinforce dominant, non-transformative ideologies. Research consistently shows that environmental narratives in ELT texts rely heavily on a neoliberal framing that disproportionately emphasises

individual responsibility for systemic problems (Lee & Nguyen, 2024; Pratolo et al., 2024). Pratolo et al. (2024) found that Indonesian ELT textbooks repeatedly frame environmental problems as matters of individual choice, using evaluative adjectives and modal verbs of suggestion while employing passive grammatical constructions that effectively obscure corporate, political, and structural dimensions of environmental degradation. Similarly, in Vietnamese ELT textbooks, discourse often anonymises major polluters – such as large factories or government actors – while placing undue blame on vulnerable or less powerful actors, such as farmers, tourists, or truck drivers (Lee & Nguyen, 2024).

This rhetorical strategy, rooted in anthropocentric ideologies, presents superficial solutions like technological fixes, eco-tourism, or individual lifestyle changes as sufficient (Lee & Nguyen, 2024). By limiting the discourse, the materials restrict students' ability to develop the necessary critical ecological literacy that would enable them to question the root causes, power structures, and systemic inequities driving environmental crises (Pratolo et al., 2024). Mambu (2023) highlights that achieving genuine criticality requires actively encouraging students to engage with texts through ideological lenses, an approach rarely supported by mainstream published materials.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development Gaps

Even where materials or curricular mandates exist, the implementation of sustainability in ELT is profoundly

hampered by inadequate teacher training and a lack of systemic support. A primary finding across multiple studies is that while teachers are highly motivated – often driven by ethical concerns – to address environmental issues, the majority lack the necessary formal training and suitable resources to do so effectively (Mercer et al., 2023; Nurhaliza et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2024). Teachers frequently express a strong willingness to teach climate change and see English lessons as an ideal space for fostering environmental literacy, yet they must rely heavily on improvisation (Nurhaliza et al., 2024). This reliance on grassroots improvisation, while demonstrating teacher commitment, is inherently unsustainable and leads to uneven integration across the system.

The lack of formal training results in teachers having limited confidence when addressing complex, interdisciplinary environmental content, making them less likely to move beyond basic vocabulary and discussion (Kazazoglu, 2025; Mercer et al., 2023). Arslan and Curle (2024) found that Turkish EFL teachers, despite conceptualising ESD as multidimensional and an important part of lifelong learning, felt it was insufficiently embedded in the national curriculum, constraining them to narrow environmental topics and superficial coverage. To fully leverage the potential of ELT, a call is consistently made for comprehensive teacher training to effectively embed sustainability into curricula (Kazazoglu, 2025).

The consensus among researchers is a pressing need for systemic support, professional development, and the development of coherent frameworks to guide practice (CT

& N, 2025; Mercer et al., 2023). For example, Maijala et al. (2024) propose the Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability model precisely to address this gap, aiming to help teachers systematically integrate action-oriented ESD principles. Without such models and the corresponding training, teachers struggle with a lack of guidance and institutional backing, which is consistently identified as a major barrier (Mercer et al., 2023).

Systemic and Institutional Constraints

Finally, the integration of sustainability is challenged by deep-seated institutional and systemic issues that operate at the policy and administrative level. Two critical systemic barriers are disciplinary silos and the pressure of assessment (CT & N, 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Sustainability is an inherently interdisciplinary topic, yet educational systems often retain rigid subject boundaries that make cross-disciplinary collaboration difficult. While scholars advocate for interdisciplinary curriculum design (de la Fuente, 2023b; Yu et al., 2024), the reality in many institutions is constrained by existing structures and a lack of mechanisms for collaboration. Furthermore, the pressure of standardised linguistic assessment often dictates classroom focus, leading teachers to prioritise content directly tied to high-stakes exams over the time-consuming, open-ended nature of sustainability-focused projects (CT & N, 2025).

Practical constraints such as limited class hours and general time constraints are frequently cited by teachers as significant obstacles to implementing hands-on, action-oriented activities necessary for ESD (Arslan & Curle, 2024;

Mercer et al., 2023). Beyond the classroom, institutional commitment itself can be inconsistent. For example, Kapranov (2022) found that the representation of sustainability on an institution's ELT-specific webpages often only partially aligned with its broader institutional sustainability goals. This suggests that the interpretation and implementation of ESD are often shaped by disciplinary priorities rather than a unified, top-down institutional policy, resulting in fragmented and diluted efforts. Consequently, there is a strong call for stronger policy frameworks and systemic support to fully leverage ELT's potential, moving it from a collection of isolated, motivated efforts into a coherent, institutionalised practice (Arslan & Curle, 2024; CT & N, 2025).

Overview of the Book

This collection of chapters brings together an international group of scholars and practitioners whose work demonstrates how ELT can meaningfully advance sustainability, equity, and global citizenship across educational contexts.

In Chapter 2, Patricia Bergström and Harry Waters explore how ELT can serve as a vehicle for cultivating sustainability mindsets and empowering students as changemakers. By integrating ESD with Self-Determination Theory, the authors demonstrate how fostering intrinsic motivation enhances both language acquisition and ecological literacy. Central to this chapter is the LEARN Framework – Listen, Encourage, Amplify, Respect, Nurture – introduced as a practical approach to embedding student-led sustainability projects into curricula. Through real-world

examples like the Plastic Clever Schools initiative and the ‘Pen Hospital,’ the chapter illustrates how educators can scaffold solution-oriented activities that build student agency. It concludes with actionable guidance for teachers, institutions, and policymakers, reimagining the ELT classroom as a launchpad for critical thinking, global citizenship, and meaningful climate action.

Building on this call for holistic transformation, Zarina Subhan argues that ELT must move beyond superficial environmental topics to address the inequities between the Global North and South. The chapter advocates for a holistic approach centred on three pillars: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes. Subhan draws parallels between the circular economy and language acquisition, urging educators to foster global citizenship and intercultural competence rather than static cultural knowledge. The chapter highlights the importance of collaborative skills in developing empathy and noticing skills essential for cross-cultural dialogue. Furthermore, Subhan challenges the industry’s avoidance of ‘political’ topics (PARSNIP), arguing that engaging with complex issues like climate justice promotes transcendent thinking and cognitive development. The chapter calls for sustainability to be woven into the very fabric of ELT curricula to empower future leaders.

Extending this critical engagement with global systems, Vicky Saumell and Marcela Villan in Chapter 4 examine the complex role of Generative AI (GenAI) in education, weighing its transformative potential against its substantial environmental footprint. The authors detail the often-overlooked ecological costs of GenAI, including the

massive energy consumption, carbon emissions, and water usage required to train large language models and cool servers. To reconcile these conflicts, the chapter outlines practical strategies for the ELT classroom, such as teaching prompt engineering to reduce digital waste and integrating projects that measure digital carbon footprints. By aligning these efforts with SDG 4 (Quality Education), the chapter advocates for a balanced approach where educators empower students to use technology ethically. It calls for a shift toward eco-friendly AI practices that support both pedagogical innovation and planetary well-being.

Turning from technology to teacher preparation, Christopher Graham examines the critical need to integrate sustainable thinking and practices into ELT initial teacher training (ITT). Drawing on survey data, Graham reveals a significant gap: the majority of current ELT ITT programmes offer minimal or no specific sustainability content, despite the global mandate for education to tackle environmental challenges. Where sustainability is included, it often remains peripheral, focusing narrowly on coursebook adaptation rather than systemic institutional change or climate action. The chapter asserts that practically engaging with sustainability themes can profoundly enhance student teachers' motivation, confidence, and language development. Graham identifies key barriers, including time constraints, lack of institutional support, and limited expertise among trainers. The chapter concludes with crucial recommendations for policymakers and curriculum designers, advocating for the systematic embedding of sustainability across ELT ITT to prepare a new generation of environmentally conscious educators.

Shifting from teacher training to learner identity and equity, Josianne Block and Armanda Stroia explore the vital role of stereotype literacy in fostering social sustainability and equity within English language classrooms. Focusing on SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), the authors present stereotype literacy as a critical skill that empowers learners to recognise, analyse, and actively challenge stereotypes that perpetuate social injustice. The chapter introduces a three-stage pedagogical approach – Understanding, Deconstructing, and Critically Producing alternative narratives – to systematically build this skill. Through practical, classroom-tested activities, Block and Stroia demonstrate how educators can create more equitable and inclusive learning environments. This approach goes beyond simple recognition to actively encourage students to “restory the self” by challenging oppressive narratives, thus fostering a mindset open to diversity and safeguarding the needs of future generations.

Connecting equity with learner engagement, Anca de Vries in Chapter 7 examines the power of play and intrinsic motivation in engaging English language learners with the critical topic of sustainability. The chapter is grounded in the principle that play is a fundamental right, linking a lack of it to potential mental health issues, and asserting that it is a key driver of intrinsic motivation, which, in turn, boosts the quality of learning and work. de Vries connects established research on motivation to practical teaching strategies, offering ways for educators to make climate and sustainability discussions more engaging and less overwhelming. By introducing game didactics and providing specific activity examples, the chapter demonstrates

how ELT professionals can integrate elements of play to foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This approach not only enhances language acquisition but also transforms emotionally challenging subjects like the climate crisis into opportunities for positive and empowering student engagement.

Expanding the conversation to global teacher development, Abel Elejo Ochika and Linda Ruas address the critical challenge of providing sustainable teacher development for ELT professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The authors highlight the current unsustainable model, characterised by reliance on external experts, costly face-to-face training, and a lack of local professional autonomy. To create an equitable and scalable system, the chapter advocates for a shift toward decentring and cascading training. Key strategies include empowering local teachers to lead sessions, utilising diverse online training modalities to reduce travel and cost, and fostering strong Communities of Practice (CoPs) via digital platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp. Drawing on successful initiatives by the British Council and Africa ELTA, Ochika and Ruas demonstrate how a mentorship-based, localised approach can ensure quality training reaches those in need, thus addressing the severe inequities in access to professional growth (aligned with SDG 4: Quality Education).

From teacher development, the book turns to classroom practice, as Marissa A. Foti explores innovative ways to integrate the SDGs into the ELT curriculum using speech analysis as a core methodology. Drawing on the UN's definition of sustainability, Foti champions speech analysis

as a dynamic tool that connects language learning with critical global issues. The chapter offers practical, adaptable approaches, both teacher-guided and student-led, for weaving SDG themes into English language lessons. Examples include analysing impactful speeches, such as Greta Thunberg's address to the UN, to simultaneously teach rhetorical devices and foster critical awareness of climate action. By blending linguistic theory with real-world practice, the chapter demonstrates how educators can contextualise global challenges, fostering learners' critical thinking, effective communication, and deeper engagement with global issues. The ultimate goal is to equip students to be thoughtful global citizens who can contribute to a sustainable future beyond the classroom.

Chapter 10 deepens the focus on the personal and emotional dimensions of sustainability, as George Kokolas explores the concept of sustainable well-being by integrating principles from Positive Education into school curricula. The chapter argues that empowering students to develop their character strengths is essential for shaping environmentally conscious attitudes and behaviours, linking personal happiness with collective responsibility for the planet. Using the widely recognised Character Strengths classification developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as a core framework, Kokolas discusses practical strategies for implementing Positive Education interventions in ELT and broader educational settings. This approach aims to foster a mindset where individual flourishing naturally aligns with environmental and social consciousness. The chapter illuminates pathways for cultivating a more equitable and sustainable future by equipping students

with the psychological tools necessary to address global challenges and thrive as responsible citizens.

Continuing the theme of inclusion and social sustainability, Savannah Davis and Kirsten Borg Cardona explore the vital, yet often overlooked, intersection of sexuality, equity, and sustainability within ELT. Aligned with SDG 10.2 (Reduced Inequalities), the authors critically analyse how heteronormative biases in ELT materials marginalise diverse sexual identities. The chapter argues that the omission or misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ experiences reinforces social inequalities, undermining the goal of creating inclusive communities. Davis and Borg Cardona provide practical, evidence-based strategies for teachers to adapt and queer existing coursebooks, integrate inclusive content, and cultivate a classroom environment that celebrates all learners. By addressing sexuality explicitly, educators can significantly contribute to students' critical awareness of social diversity, promoting acceptance, dignity, and a sustainable future where no one is left behind.

From social inclusion, the book turns to ecological and spiritual perspectives, as Carol Samlal in Chapter 12 champions the integration of Indigenous wisdom and reciprocity into English language lessons to foster a deeper, more spiritual connection with nature, specifically focusing on water conservation. The chapter argues that water should be treated as a sacred gift and not a commodity, a view shared by Indigenous cultures globally. Samlal advocates for adopting and adapting Native American teachings about 'water-bearers' or 'keepers of the water,' which traditionally link the life-giving role of women and girls to

the sustenance of the community. Practical ELT activities, such as using storytelling and the Water Song, are proposed to raise awareness of threats to water and encourage conservation. By giving greater presence to women's voices, supported by the wider community, the chapter shows how ELT can teach sustainability through kindness, leading students and teachers to embrace the spiritual connection with this vital resource.

The book concludes by returning to the challenges of contemporary education, as Rrita Suli addresses the critical issue of digital wellness in the ELT classroom, driven by the increasing integration of technology. Aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), the chapter investigates how the demands of contemporary, digitally integrated education can affect students' mental, social, and emotional health. Suli highlights that while digital tools are necessary for developing digital literacy, their irresponsible or excessive use can negatively impact overall well-being, particularly by reducing social interaction and immediate interpersonal support. The chapter explores key factors that shape student well-being in digital environments and advances the understanding of digital wellness within ELT contexts. Suli provides thoughtful guidance and recommendations for educators on cultivating healthy digital habits and creating learning opportunities that foster well-being alongside effective language learning outcomes.

References

- Alcantud-Díaz, M., & Lloret-Catalá, C. (2023). Bridging the gap between teacher training and society: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in English as a foreign language (EFL). *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2283510>
- Arslan, S., & Curle, S. (2024). Institutionalising English as a foreign language teachers for global sustainability: Perceptions of education for sustainable development in Turkey. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102353>
- Barber, D., Bilsborough, K., Graham, C., & Kral, T. (2022). *Climate action in language education: Activities for low resource classrooms*. British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/2022-04/Climate_action_language_education_Activities_low_resource_classrooms.pdf
- Beasy, K., Smith, C., & Watson, J. (2023). Setting the scene: The Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of education. In K. Beasy, C. Smith, & J. Watson (Eds.), *Education and the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Praxis within and beyond the classroom* (pp. 3–9). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3802-5_1
- Brown, C. A. (2024). Role of the English teaching hidden curriculum in sustainability education: The case of Japan. *Environmental Education Research*, 30(8), 1211–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2024.2309583>
- Cordova, M. (2024). Integrating sustainable development goals in English language and literature teaching. *Frontiers in Education*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1330034>
- Cristovão, V. L. L., Sanches, B., & Smart, G. (2022). Environmental discourse in Brazilian English-as-a-foreign-language textbooks: Socio-discursive practices and their implications for developing students' critical environmental literacy. *Environmental Education Research*, 28(1), 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2021.2007855>

- CT, D., & N., S. (2025). A systematic review on integrating environmental sustainability in English language teaching: Strategies for Sustainable Development Goals. *Frontiers in Education, 10*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1636623>
- Dağtaş, A. (2025). Ecopedagogy in educational research with reflections for ELT: A bibliometric analysis. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education, 14*(4), 1129–1142. <https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.1638367>
- Davari, H., Hassani, G., Iranmehr, A., & Ghorbanpour, A. (2025). Environmental communication through language education: Iranian teachers' perceptions on integrating environmental communication pedagogy into English language teaching. *Environmental Communication, 19*(7), 1342–1358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2025.2464171>
- de la Fuente, M. J. (2023a). Introduction: Toward education for sustainable development (ESD) in foreign languages. In M. J. de la Fuente (Ed.), *Education for sustainable development in foreign language learning: Content-based instruction in college-level curricula* (pp. 1–13). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080183-1>
- de la Fuente, M. J. (2023b). Problem-based pedagogy for the advanced college language curriculum: Becoming a multicompetent language user through sustainability education. In M. J. de la Fuente (Ed.), *Education for sustainable development in foreign language learning: Content-based instruction in college-level curricula* (pp. 65–84). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080183-6>
- Ferry, M. M. (2023). Project-based language learning: Addressing cultural and linguistic diversity issues in climate action. In M. J. de la Fuente (Ed.), *Education for sustainable development in foreign language learning: Content-based instruction in college-level curricula* (pp. 49–64). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080183-5>
- Graham, C. (2022). *Fifty ways to be a greener teacher: Tips for ESL/EFL teachers*. Wayzgoose Press.
- Kapranov, O. (2022). The discourse of sustainability in English language teaching (ELT) at the University of Oxford: Analyzing discursive representations. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability, 24*(1), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2022-0004>

- Kazazoglu, S. (2025). Environmental education through eco-literacy: Integrating sustainability into English language teaching. *Sustainability*, 17(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17052156>
- Kumari, K. (2020). Integrating sustainable development in ELT classes. *Language in India*, 20(7), 59–66. <https://www.languageinindia.com/july2020/drkabitaeenglishsustainabledevelopmentfinal.pdf>
- Lee, D. B., & Nguyen, T.-H.-N. (2024). The treatment of environmental literacy in the ELT textbooks in Vietnam. *Cogent Education*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2425898>
- Maijala, M., Gericke, N., Kuusalu, S.-R., Heikkola, L. M., Mutta, M., Mäntylä, K., & Rose, J. (2024). Conceptualising transformative language teaching for sustainability and why it is needed. *Environmental Education Research*, 30(3), 377–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2023.2167941>
- Mambu, J. E. (2023). Embedding Sustainable Development Goals into critical English language teaching and learning. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 20(1), 46–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2099863>
- Mercer, S., Ibrahim, N. C., Bilsborough, K., Jones, C., & Potzinger, C. (2023). Teacher perspectives on addressing environmental issues in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 77(4), 393–406. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccac039>
- Mondal, K., & Khalid, S. (2025). Integrating Green ELT practices and the UN Sustainable Development Goals in English language teaching: Addressing climate anxiety and promoting social responsibility. *I-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, 15(2), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.26634/jelt.15.2.21460>
- Nurhaliza, S., Silvhiyani, S., & Inderawati, R. (2024). Integrating climate change education in English lessons and P5 projects in junior high schools. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(4), 1926–1938. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v12i4.12622>
- Penny, H., & Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2024). Effective CLIL materials design: A focus on sustainability education and the holistic learner in Spain. In A. Cirocki, R. Farrelly & T. Sapp (Eds.), *Developing materials for innovative teaching and sustainable learning: ELT*

- practitioners' experiences from diverse global contexts* (pp. 325–354). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69206-2_13
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. American Psychological Association.
- Pratolo, B. W., Purwanti, E., Humanika, E. S., Bao, D., Najmi, A. H., Oktavianti, I. N., Surono, S., & Sari, D. M. (2024). Eco-lexicons in ELT: Analyzing environmental narratives through critical discourse analysis. *BIO Web of Conferences*, 148. <https://doi.org/10.1051/bioconf/202414802035>
- Rafiee Moghadam, N., Haddad Narafshan, M., & Anjomshoa, L. (2022). Education for sustainable development: Effects of sustainability education on English language learners' empathy and reading comprehension. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 53(5), 280–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2022.2107605>
- Römhild, R. (2023). *Global citizenship, ecomedia and English language education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44674-0>
- Saiful, J. A., & Shein, P. P. (2025). “Feeling closer to nature” through ecocritical ELT. *ELT Journal*, 79(3), 339–351. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaf007>
- Sun, Y. (2025). From language learning to sustainability: Enhancing intercultural competence and global skills through foreign language education. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-02-2025-0083>
- Toppo, N., & Rahman, M. (2021). Socio-cultural sustainability through study material: English language teaching in India. *Problemy Ekorozwoju – Problems of Sustainable Development*, 16(2), 245–249. <https://doi.org/10.35784/pe.2021.2.26>
- UN. (n.d.). *The 17 goals*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Usama, M., & Tarai, S. (2024). Ecolinguistic approach in English language education: Enhancing English language proficiency and sustainability awareness. *Language in India*, 24(7), 112–129. <https://www.languageinindia.com/july2024/usamaecoenglish1.pdf>

- Xerri, D. (2017). Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In A. Maley & N. Peachey (Eds.), *Integrating global issues in the creative English language classroom: With reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (pp. 49–55). British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/PUB_29200_Creativity_UN_SDG_v4S_WEB.pdf
- Xerri, D. (2025). Glocalizing students' reflection on the marine environment through writing. In N. Wright (Ed.), *Glocalising approaches to learning and teaching English: Voices from periphery* (pp. 201–216). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-82139-4_11
- Yu, B., Guo, W. Y., & Fu, H. (2024). Sustainability in English language teaching: Strategies for empowering students to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainability*, 16(8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16083325>