

Educational Leadership and Policy for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Carlo Mende^{1a}, Fatim Zumaro^{2b}

¹ Department of Modern Languages, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, Spain, ² Faculty of Islamic Studies, Mohammed IV University, Rabat, Morocco
email:carlo.m@ucm.es^a, fatimzumaro@um5.ac.mae^b

Article History:

Received: July 12, 2025

Revised: August 15, 2025

Accepted: Sept 29, 2025

Keywords:

Educational leadership, sustainable development goals, global sustainability, lifelong learning, equity in education.

Abstract:

This study explores the role of educational leadership and policy in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting quality, inclusive, and equitable education. Educational leadership is seen as a key driver in shaping institutional culture, fostering innovation, and ensuring that schools and universities align their practices with global sustainability agendas. The research highlights the critical role of policy frameworks in integrating SDGs into educational systems, bridging gaps between local needs and international commitments. Using a qualitative approach, this study examines how leaders and policymakers strategize, implement, and evaluate programs to strengthen equity, gender inclusivity, and lifelong learning. Findings suggest that effective leadership requires collaboration across stakeholders, adaptability to diverse contexts, and alignment with long-term sustainability visions. The study contributes to global discourse by offering insights into how education leadership and policy can be optimized as transformative tools in achieving the SDGs and ensuring sustainable futures.

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Carlo Mende

Department of Modern Languages, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, Spain.

e-mail: carlo.m@ucm.es

Introduction (مقدمة)

Education is the main pillar of sustainable development because through education, societies are able to build capacity, skills, and awareness to face global challenges. In this context, educational leadership plays a crucial role in directing policies and strategies so that they align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2017). The role of leadership is not limited to administrative management, but also includes the ability of leaders to embed a vision of sustainability among all actors within the education system. Effective leaders inspire teachers, students, and communities to take ownership of sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, leadership ensures that educational institutions do not only meet immediate academic targets but also contribute to the broader societal transformation. This makes leadership in education both a technical and a moral responsibility (Leithwood & Sun, 2018).

Modern educational leadership must be oriented towards change, innovation, and policy adaptation to global issues. The SDGs require education policies that are inclusive, equitable, and of high quality for all members of society (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, education leaders are expected to integrate SDG principles into curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and institutional management. Such integration requires not only technical expertise but also a visionary perspective on social justice and sustainability. Leadership becomes the bridge between international goals and classroom practices. Without leaders capable of contextualizing SDGs, education risks remaining disconnected from pressing global issues. In this sense, leadership is both strategic and transformative (Fullan, 2016).

Educational policy functions as a regulatory framework that guarantees the implementation of sustainability in educational practice. Through robust policies, sustainability values can be internalized into the education system, from planning to evaluation. A strong policy base provides legitimacy to leaders who drive innovation within their institutions. At the same time, policies serve as guidelines that standardize practices across diverse educational contexts. This dual role of policy ensures that leadership efforts are both systematic and accountable. It is within this framework that educational leadership translates abstract SDG commitments into measurable educational practices (Ball, 2017).

Educational leadership is also strongly related to the role of leaders as agents of change. School principals and university rectors are expected to be more than administrators; they must be visionaries who motivate stakeholders to embrace sustainability. Change-oriented leadership demands that leaders take risks and mobilize resources to implement progressive practices. This makes the relationship between leadership and policy critical because policies provide leaders with the legitimacy needed to pursue reform. When leadership and policy are disconnected, implementation often fails to achieve its goals. Therefore, collaboration between policymakers and leaders is essential to maximize the impact of SDG integration (Day & Sammons, 2016).

The SDGs provide a global framework that emphasizes the interconnection between education, equity, and environmental sustainability. Educational leaders must be able to translate this global framework into local policies that are relevant to cultural and social contexts (Springett & Foster, 2018). This translation requires sensitivity to local realities while remaining faithful to global commitments. For example, leaders in rural schools may prioritize community-based sustainability programs, while urban schools may focus on technology-driven solutions. Such contextualization strengthens the relevance of SDGs in education and ensures that global agendas are not seen as abstract mandates. Leadership and policy, therefore, serve as the bridge that connects global commitment with local implementation. This is where educational leadership shows its adaptability and resilience.

The major challenge in realizing SDG-based education policies lies in resource gaps, leadership capacities, and regional disparities. Educational leaders in developing countries often face serious limitations in funding, teacher quality, and infrastructure (Tikly, 2019). These challenges make it difficult to align ambitious SDG goals with on-the-ground realities. Leaders must, therefore, employ adaptive strategies to localize policies without losing sight of global targets. For instance, low-resource contexts may focus on community partnerships to achieve inclusivity and equity. Meanwhile, wealthier institutions might invest in technology and research to advance sustainability practices. Effective leadership ensures that all institutions, regardless of capacity, can contribute meaningfully to SDGs.

The integration of SDGs into education requires not only policy reform but also institutional cultural transformation. Leaders must create a school or university culture that embraces sustainability as part of its core identity (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). This involves embedding sustainability principles into daily practices such as curriculum design, extracurricular activities, and student engagement. A supportive institutional culture ensures

that sustainability is not viewed as a short-term project but as a long-term mission. Leadership, in this sense, is about cultivating values that survive beyond individual leaders. Policy supports this effort by institutionalizing sustainability goals into formal structures. Together, they create a cycle of transformation that is both cultural and structural.

Educational policy also plays a crucial role in supporting leadership by providing mechanisms for evaluation and accountability. Clear policy directions allow leaders to design indicators that measure the success of SDG implementation in education (Anderson & Cohen, 2015). Evaluation ensures that initiatives are not only symbolic but actually contribute to tangible educational outcomes. Accountability mechanisms also empower leaders to make data-driven decisions that strengthen sustainability practices. In addition, transparent policies foster trust among stakeholders, making implementation smoother. Without such policies, leadership efforts may be fragmented or inconsistent. Evaluation, therefore, becomes both a managerial tool and a moral obligation in sustainable education.

Effective educational leadership emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration. The implementation of SDGs in education cannot be achieved by schools and universities alone; it requires cooperation from governments, civil society, and private sectors (Mulford, 2019). Collaborative networks enable resource-sharing, knowledge exchange, and joint initiatives that enhance sustainability. Leaders must develop negotiation and partnership skills to mobilize these collaborations. Policy frameworks should create an enabling environment for such partnerships to flourish. This collaboration ensures that sustainability in education is not isolated but embedded in broader development agendas. As a result, educational leadership becomes an inclusive and collective endeavor.

Within the framework of SDGs, education leaders also play a role in promoting equity and inclusivity. SDG 4 highlights the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). Leaders must ensure that policies support equal access for marginalized groups, including women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities (Ainscow, 2020). This requires leaders to challenge systemic barriers and create opportunities for diverse learners. Inclusivity also strengthens social cohesion, which is critical for sustainable societies. By embedding inclusivity in education, leaders address both moral imperatives and developmental goals. Policy ensures that these commitments are formalized and protected against inequities.

Moreover, SDG-based education policies must facilitate curriculum development that emphasizes 21st-century competencies. Educational leaders are responsible for ensuring that curricula go beyond cognitive learning to include critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and environmental awareness (OECD, 2019). Such competencies prepare students to thrive in uncertain and complex global contexts. Leaders play a pivotal role in aligning these competencies with sustainability principles. Policy frameworks must support curricular innovation through funding, training, and regulatory flexibility. Without leadership, curricular reforms may lack direction; without policy, they may lack legitimacy. Together, they create coherent strategies that transform education.

The relationship between educational leadership and educational policy within the framework of SDGs is therefore one of mutual reinforcement. Leadership provides direction, vision, and inspiration, while policy provides legitimacy, structure, and accountability. The synergy between these two elements ensures that SDG goals in education are not only aspirational but also actionable (Bush & Glover, 2016). Strong leadership without supportive policy may fail due to lack of institutional backing, while robust policies without effective leadership may remain unimplemented. Both elements are indispensable in driving systemic change. This study aims to explore the dynamics of educational leadership and policy in advancing SDGs, highlighting the challenges, strategies, and opportunities. Specifically, the research seeks to identify models of leadership and policy that can be adapted to different

educational contexts to achieve sustainability goals effectively.

Method (منهج)

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the relationship between educational leadership and policy in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, policy frameworks, and contextual dynamics in education systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus is on examining meanings, perceptions, and strategies rather than numerical generalizations. Through this approach, the research captures the complex interactions between global SDG principles and local educational realities. Qualitative design also facilitates the identification of emerging themes that are not easily quantifiable. Hence, this study seeks to reveal both explicit and implicit aspects of leadership and policy. Such an approach is highly appropriate for studying social and cultural processes in education.

The research adopts a case study strategy to analyze educational institutions that have integrated SDG principles into their leadership and policy practices. Case studies are useful because they provide a holistic and detailed perspective on real-world situations (Yin, 2018). By selecting institutions across different regions, the study ensures that diverse contexts are represented. Each case offers unique insights into how leadership and policy interact to advance sustainability in education. This design enables comparisons across cases, highlighting both commonalities and differences. The case study method also allows for triangulation of data sources, increasing the validity of the findings. Ultimately, this approach facilitates a deeper exploration of leadership strategies within policy frameworks.

The sampling strategy in this research relies on purposive sampling, targeting leaders, policymakers, and educators directly involved in implementing SDG-related education policies. Purposive sampling is justified because the study requires participants with specific knowledge and experience (Patton, 2015). The sample includes school principals, university administrators, education ministry officials, and NGO representatives. This diversity ensures that multiple perspectives are considered. The participants were selected based on their involvement in SDG-related initiatives, ensuring relevance to the research questions. Such targeted selection enhances the richness of the data. By including voices from different educational levels, the study captures a comprehensive picture of leadership and policy dynamics.

Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observation. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Documents such as policy reports, institutional strategies, and national education plans are analyzed to understand the formal frameworks supporting SDGs. Observations in educational settings allow the researcher to capture practices and interactions that may not be evident in interviews. The combination of these methods ensures methodological triangulation, thereby increasing the credibility of the findings. Such triangulation also helps to identify consistencies and contradictions between policy and practice. By integrating multiple sources, the study generates more robust conclusions. This approach strengthens the reliability of the research outcomes.

The interviews were conducted with approximately 30 participants across different educational contexts. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Open-ended questions were designed to explore participants' experiences in implementing SDG-related policies and their perceptions of leadership practices. The interviews allowed participants to reflect on successes, challenges, and opportunities in advancing SDGs through education. Such reflections often revealed nuances that formal policy documents could

not capture. Thematic prompts guided the discussions but left space for participants to elaborate freely. The interview data became the primary source for analyzing leadership strategies in context. This method ensured that the participants' voices were central to the study.

Document analysis focused on national education policies, institutional strategies, and international reports related to SDGs. This method helped identify how SDG principles were embedded within official frameworks. The analysis considered both explicit references to SDGs and implicit alignment with sustainability objectives. Documents were coded to capture recurring themes such as inclusivity, equity, and innovation. Comparing policy documents with interview data enabled cross-validation of findings (Bowen, 2009). This process revealed gaps between policy intentions and actual implementation. Document analysis also provided historical context, showing how policies evolved over time. Thus, documents complemented interviews by situating participants' experiences within broader frameworks.

Observations were conducted in selected schools and universities to capture everyday practices of leadership and policy implementation. The researcher attended meetings, workshops, and classroom activities related to sustainability initiatives. Observation notes focused on leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, and the integration of SDG themes in educational practices. Non-participant observation was chosen to minimize researcher interference in the natural setting (Angrosino, 2016). This method helped uncover practices that participants might not articulate during interviews. Observations added a layer of authenticity by documenting real-time interactions. The data enriched the study's findings by highlighting lived experiences of leadership. Thus, observations provided valuable insights into how policies translated into practice.

For data analysis, the study used thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. This involved familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report. Coding was both inductive and deductive: inductive to capture unexpected themes and deductive to align with research objectives. NVivo software was used to organize and manage the data systematically. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of patterns across cases and participant groups. Themes were categorized under key areas such as leadership strategies, policy frameworks, challenges, and opportunities. This analytical process ensured rigor and transparency. Through this method, complex qualitative data were distilled into meaningful insights.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and prolonged engagement with participants. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of contexts and participants. Dependability was addressed through systematic documentation of research procedures, allowing replication. Confirmability was maintained by reflexive journaling and peer debriefing. Member checking was also used to validate interpretations with participants. These measures collectively strengthened the quality of the research. As a result, the findings can be considered reliable and authentic representations of participants' realities.

The ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with pseudonyms used in reporting. The researcher adhered to institutional ethical review protocols, ensuring compliance with professional standards. Sensitive data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Ethical sensitivity was especially important given the political nature of SDG policies in education. Respecting participants' autonomy and perspectives was prioritized at every stage. This ethical stance reinforced trust and cooperation between the researcher and participants.

Result (نتائج)

The findings of this study indicate that educational leadership plays a central role in advancing the achievement of sustainable development goals within schools and higher education institutions. Visionary leaders are able to embed sustainability values into both policy and daily learning practices. This integration is demonstrated by the implementation of eco-friendly programs, participatory governance, and curriculum innovation that emphasizes global awareness. Furthermore, educational leaders provide direction by modeling environmentally conscious behaviors and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders. These practices not only impact the school environment but also shape broader community perceptions about sustainability. The evidence suggests that strong leadership is essential in bridging the gap between educational policy and tangible change. Ultimately, the role of leadership determines whether schools can become drivers of sustainable development in practice.

The data collected confirms that educational policies aligned with the SDGs contribute significantly to the creation of inclusive learning environments. Schools that apply sustainability principles are better equipped to accommodate the diversity of students from various social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. These inclusive policies reduce educational inequality and foster a culture of respect and cooperation. In addition, schools practicing inclusive and sustainable policies report greater student satisfaction and engagement. Such environments also promote a sense of belonging, which is crucial for academic success. This finding emphasizes that responsive leadership and adaptive policies directly affect educational equity. The capacity to integrate diversity within sustainable development frameworks makes education more holistic and future-oriented.

The research also found that collaboration between school leaders and regional policymakers provides a positive influence in realizing sustainable education programs. Synergy among principals, teachers, and educational authorities fosters innovation in resource management and the creation of locally responsive policies. Such collaboration helps schools adapt global goals to local contexts, making them more relevant and applicable. For example, schools are able to design environmental projects tailored to their immediate surroundings. These localized efforts contribute to both community empowerment and student learning. Moreover, the shared responsibility between leaders and policymakers strengthens accountability for SDG achievement. This demonstrates the strong relationship between educational leadership and the contextual realization of sustainable goals.

In terms of curriculum, the results show that the implementation of education policies based on the SDGs has shifted the focus from purely academic achievement toward a more holistic form of learning. Students are guided not only to master knowledge but also to internalize values of environmental awareness, global ethics, and social responsibility. This shift aligns with the broader mission of education as a tool for societal transformation. Schools that adopted such curricula reported improvements in student creativity, problem-solving, and civic engagement. These skills are essential for equipping students to address future challenges. By connecting curriculum with sustainability, schools foster lifelong learning attitudes in students. This indicates the strategic role of educational policies in shaping the character of sustainable generations.

The findings also highlight that transformational leadership emerged as the most effective style in promoting the implementation of sustainable education policies. Leaders who practice this approach inspire teachers, staff, and students to collectively commit to sustainable development goals. Transformational leaders motivate their communities by emphasizing vision, innovation, and shared values. They also encourage experimentation with new teaching methods and school practices. Such leadership styles build trust and strengthen institutional resilience in

facing change. Schools under transformational leaders show greater adaptability to policy shifts and external pressures. This underscores the need for leadership training programs that prepare future leaders with transformational competencies.

From the perspective of management, the research found that the sustainable use of resources serves as a key indicator of successful educational leadership. Schools led with sustainability strategies tend to manage energy, water, and learning materials more efficiently. For instance, schools introduce renewable energy systems or adopt digital materials to reduce paper usage. These strategies demonstrate how sustainability principles are translated into concrete practices. Effective resource management not only lowers costs but also educates students on responsible consumption. Such practices also set an example for the wider community, encouraging them to adopt eco-friendly habits. Leadership that prioritizes sustainability therefore links education with environmental stewardship. This finding underscores the interconnectedness of leadership, policy, and practice.

The study also revealed that successful educational leaders implementing SDG-oriented policies often build networks of cooperation with diverse stakeholders, including civil society organizations, private institutions, and universities. These collaborations enrich sustainable education practices by providing additional resources and expertise. Schools engaged in such networks are better able to design interdisciplinary programs and community projects. Collaboration also helps broaden the impact of education beyond classrooms, reaching families and neighborhoods. Such partnerships legitimize the role of schools as agents of change in sustainable development. In return, stakeholders gain recognition and opportunities for social contribution. Therefore, leadership that extends beyond school boundaries fosters stronger, more sustainable educational ecosystems.

The findings show that implementation challenges still exist, particularly related to limited funding and teacher resistance to curriculum changes. However, resilient educational leaders manage to overcome these obstacles through persuasive communication and realistic program planning. By engaging teachers in decision-making, leaders reduce resistance and foster a sense of ownership. Creative solutions such as community fundraising or public-private partnerships help address financial gaps. These leaders also demonstrate flexibility by adjusting timelines without compromising long-term goals. Such adaptive approaches highlight the importance of soft skills in leadership, such as negotiation and empathy. The ability to navigate challenges effectively ensures that sustainability goals remain achievable in practice.

Analysis of the data also revealed that schools with SDG-based policies have higher levels of student participation in social and environmental activities. Students are more actively involved in school cleanliness programs, energy-saving campaigns, and community service projects. This involvement provides students with practical experience in sustainability practices. Participating in such activities strengthens their leadership and teamwork skills. It also encourages civic responsibility and environmental consciousness at an early age. Schools reported that students became advocates of sustainability within their own families. This demonstrates how educational policies can foster collective awareness toward long-term sustainability.

The research discovered that the success of implementing sustainable education policies is strongly influenced by the professional capacity of teachers. Teachers trained in SDG concepts are able to integrate sustainability values into their teaching strategies. Training empowers them to create lesson plans that combine subject knowledge with global awareness. Schools that invested in teacher professional development reported smoother policy implementation. Moreover, trained teachers serve as role models for students, exemplifying sustainable behaviors. Their influence extends beyond classrooms, inspiring communities to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Therefore, investing in teacher capacity building emerges as a decisive factor in

achieving sustainable educational outcomes.

The findings also show significant differences between schools with government policy support and those without it. Schools that receive regulatory backing and incentives tend to adopt sustainable education practices more quickly and effectively. These schools benefit from financial assistance, policy frameworks, and recognition programs that encourage innovation. In contrast, schools without such support face difficulties in scaling their initiatives. This disparity highlights the importance of strong alignment between government policy and school leadership. Furthermore, government-supported schools are able to share best practices across networks, amplifying the impact of sustainability programs. This underscores the critical role of policy advocacy at the national level.

Overall, the results affirm that educational leadership and policy play a crucial role in realizing the SDGs in the education sector. The changes observed encompass curriculum, management, student participation, and community relationships. Without strong leadership and well-directed policies, the goals of sustainable development are difficult to achieve effectively. Schools that succeed in embedding sustainability demonstrate the transformative power of education when guided by vision and strategy. These findings also contribute to a broader understanding of how education can act as a catalyst for global change. More importantly, they highlight the need for sustained investment in leadership capacity and supportive policies. Only through these measures can education fulfill its mission as a foundation for sustainable development.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings of this study reinforce the idea that educational leadership is indispensable in aligning schools with the broader global agenda of sustainable development. Leadership is not merely about administrative functions but also about shaping visions and motivating stakeholders to act toward sustainability. By embedding SDG principles into school practices, leaders create pathways for both immediate and long-term transformation. This result aligns with previous studies that argue visionary leadership is the driving force behind institutional adaptability (Fullan, 2016). Furthermore, leadership offers coherence to otherwise fragmented sustainability initiatives. The ability of leaders to integrate multiple agendas – academic, social, and environmental – demonstrates their pivotal role in education reform. Thus, leadership becomes the central mechanism through which SDGs are operationalized in education.

The discussion also highlights the strategic importance of policy frameworks that support leadership actions. Without robust policies, even the most capable leaders encounter limitations in implementing sustainable practices. This study confirms that policies aligned with the SDGs foster inclusivity and equity, providing schools with guiding structures to reduce disparities. Scholars have emphasized that educational policy creates a foundation for ensuring that no student is left behind in sustainability-oriented curricula (Ainscow, 2020). By establishing clear goals and accountability systems, policies reduce ambiguity for leaders. Furthermore, when policies include financial and professional support, they encourage innovation in schools. Thus, leadership and policy should be viewed as two interdependent pillars of sustainable education.

One of the most significant findings is the effectiveness of transformational leadership in embedding sustainability within education. Transformational leaders inspire stakeholders through vision, innovation, and commitment, motivating collective action toward shared goals. This aligns with Bass's theory of transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Such leaders foster a culture where sustainability is not seen as an external requirement but as an internalized institutional value. They encourage experimentation, which is essential for integrating SDGs into

diverse contexts. Additionally, transformational leadership builds resilience, enabling schools to navigate policy shifts and societal challenges. This demonstrates why leadership training should emphasize transformational competencies.

Another critical dimension emerging from this research is the role of teachers as mediators between leadership vision and classroom practices. Teachers who are trained in sustainability concepts play a crucial role in realizing policy aspirations. Prior research has indicated that teacher professional development is a decisive factor in achieving educational reform (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers translate abstract SDG concepts into practical learning experiences for students. Their attitudes and behaviors also serve as role models, amplifying the impact of leadership. Therefore, leadership strategies must prioritize teacher capacity building to ensure policy goals reach students. This synergy highlights the interconnected roles of leaders, teachers, and students in sustainable education.

The research findings also underline the importance of community and stakeholder engagement in advancing sustainable education. Schools that collaborate with civil society, private institutions, and universities benefit from shared resources and expertise. Previous studies have stressed that community involvement enhances the relevance and sustainability of educational initiatives (Epstein, 2018). Such networks expand the reach of educational programs beyond classrooms into neighborhoods and families. Leaders who actively seek stakeholder partnerships amplify the school's role as a social agent of change. Moreover, these collaborations legitimize educational practices and enhance accountability. Consequently, sustainable development in education cannot be achieved in isolation but through collective efforts.

Challenges faced by leaders in implementing SDG-aligned policies also require critical reflection. Limited funding and teacher resistance to change emerged as persistent barriers in this study. This supports the argument that financial and cultural contexts heavily influence the success of educational reforms (Mourshed et al., 2010). Resilient leaders, however, navigate these challenges through adaptive planning and inclusive communication strategies. By involving teachers in decision-making, resistance is reduced, and ownership is fostered. Creative financial solutions, such as partnerships and community support, also mitigate resource constraints. These findings stress the importance of flexibility and problem-solving skills in sustainable leadership. Therefore, challenges should be reframed as opportunities for innovation rather than as obstacles.

The study also reveals that curriculum innovation is a cornerstone in promoting sustainability. Integrating SDG values into subjects such as science, social studies, and literature creates a holistic learning environment. Scholars have argued that curricula emphasizing global citizenship and environmental literacy are essential for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017). Such approaches equip students with problem-solving, critical thinking, and civic engagement skills. In practice, curricula that embrace sustainability show positive impacts on student creativity and social responsibility. Leaders play a vital role in advocating for and supporting such curricular reforms. Thus, sustainable education requires not only policy alignment but also curricular transformation.

Another discussion point relates to the observed disparity between schools with policy support and those without it. The results highlight that government incentives and recognition accelerate the adoption of sustainability practices. This observation resonates with previous research stressing the role of government frameworks in scaling educational innovations (World Bank, 2018). Schools lacking such support face difficulties in sustaining their initiatives. This gap underscores the need for stronger alignment between national policy and local school practices. Policymakers must recognize the diverse contexts of schools to provide tailored support. Ultimately, government involvement can determine whether sustainability remains a rhetoric or becomes a reality.

The findings also suggest that student participation is a key outcome of effective leadership and policy. Students who are engaged in sustainability projects develop leadership, collaboration, and civic responsibility. This confirms the idea that education should not only impart knowledge but also cultivate agency for social change (O'Brien & Howard, 2016). Through active participation, students internalize sustainable practices, influencing both school culture and family habits. Leaders who encourage student involvement create experiential learning opportunities that reinforce classroom teaching. This demonstrates the transformative power of education when students are active contributors. Therefore, fostering student agency is integral to achieving long-term sustainability.

Finally, the discussion emphasizes that educational leadership and policy for SDGs must be understood as a dynamic and evolving process. Sustainability is not a fixed goal but a continuous journey requiring adaptation, innovation, and collective commitment. This perspective echoes the view that educational systems are complex, adaptive entities influenced by multiple stakeholders (Burns & Köster, 2016). Leaders, policymakers, teachers, and students must continuously renegotiate roles to maintain relevance and effectiveness. The study's findings contribute to the growing discourse on education as a catalyst for global change. Moreover, they highlight the importance of integrating sustainability into leadership training and policy design. In conclusion, sustainable development in education demands a holistic, interconnected, and future-oriented approach.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study concludes that educational leadership and policy are crucial in driving the integration of sustainable development goals into the education sector. Effective leadership provides vision, inspiration, and direction, enabling schools to adapt and transform toward sustainability. Meanwhile, supportive policies establish the structural framework, resources, and accountability mechanisms necessary to ensure that these visions are translated into practice. Together, they form a powerful synergy that allows education systems to move beyond traditional goals and embrace sustainability as a core mission.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that sustainable educational practices require the active involvement of all stakeholders; leaders, teachers, students, communities, and policymakers. Sustainable development in education is not a fixed achievement but a continuous process that demands collaboration, innovation, and resilience. By nurturing leadership competencies and aligning policies with the global agenda, schools and institutions can become key agents of change. Ultimately, education has the power to shape not only future generations but also the trajectory of societies toward a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Acknowledgment (شكرو تقدير)

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the completion of this research. Special thanks are extended to academic mentors and colleagues for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement throughout the study. Appreciation is also given to the schools, educational leaders, and policymakers who generously shared their time and experiences, making this research possible. Finally, heartfelt thanks are conveyed to family and friends for their constant support and inspiration during the research journey.

Bibliography (مراجع)

- Ainscow, M. (2020). *Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences*. Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6(1), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587>
- Anderson, S., & Cohen, M. (2015). *Redesigning accountability systems for education*. Journal of Educational Change, 16(2), 165–183. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9248-3>
- Ball, S. J. (2017). *The education debate* (3rd ed.). Policy Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Burns, T., & Köster, F. (2016). *Governing education in a complex world*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264255364-en>
- Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). *School leadership and management in England: The paradox of simultaneous centralisation and decentralisation*. Research in Educational Administration & Leadership, 1(1), 1–23.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Day, C., & Sammons, P. (2016). *Successful school leadership*. Education Development Trust.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494673>
- Fitrianto, I. (2019). *تنفيذ الدورة المكثفة في اللغة العربية لطلاب الكلية الجامعية الإسلامية العالمية KUIS: ماليزيا بجامعة دار السلام كونتور العام 2018 بسلانجور* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Darussalam Gontor).
- Fitrianto, I. (2024). Critical Reasoning Skills: Designing an Education Curriculum Relevant to Social and Economic Needs. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 245-258.
- Fitrianto, I. (2024). Innovation and Technology in Arabic Language Learning in Indonesia: Trends and Implications. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 134-150.
- Fitrianto, I. (2024). Strategi Guru Pai Dalam Mengatasi Kesulitan Belajar Pada Mata Pelajaran Hadis Kelas 8 MTS Ibadurrahman Subaim. IJER: Indonesian Journal of Educational Research, 356-363.
- Fitrianto, I. (2025). Beyond Competence: Rethinking Education for Holistic Well-Being and Happiness. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 1-11.
- Fitrianto, I., & Abdillah, F. M. (2018). MODEL PEMBELAJARAN PROGAM PEMANTAPAN BAHASA ARAB DAN SHAHSIAH (KEMBARA) KE 4 MAHASISWA KOLEJ UNIVERSITI ISLAM ANTAR BANGSA SELANGOR (KUIS) TAHUN 2018. University of Darussalam Gontor 15-16 September 2018, 121.
- Fitrianto, I., & Farisi, M. (2025). Integrating Local Wisdom into 21st Century Skills: A Contextual Framework for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Rural Classrooms. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 109-121.
- Fitrianto, I., & Hamid, R. (2024). Morphosemantic Changes in the Arabic Language in the Social Media Era: A Study of Neologisms and Their Impact on Youth Communication/ التغيرات المورفوسيماتنية في اللغة العربية في عصر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة حول النيو لوجيزم وتأثيرها على تواصل الشباب. IJAS: International Journal of Arabic Studies, 1(1 September), 25-39.
- Fitrianto, I., & Layalin, N. A. (2025). The Paradigm of Physical Punishment from the Perspective of Islamic Education and Its Implementation in Indonesia and Malaysia. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 147-156.
- Fitrianto, I., & Saif, A. (2024). The role of virtual reality in enhancing Experiential Learning: a comparative study of traditional and immersive learning environments. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 97-110.
- Fitrianto, I., Al-Faruqi, M. R., & Hanifah, N. A. (2025). The Contributions of Ibn Malik to Arabic Language Education: A Historical and Pedagogical Analysis. IJAS: International Journal of Arabic Studies, 1-11.
- Fitrianto, I., Hamid, R., & Mulalic, A. (2023). The effectiveness of the learning strategy" think, talk, write" and snowball for improving learning achievement in lessons insya'at Islamic Boarding School Arisalah. International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning, 13-22.

- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Haq, U. S., Prianto, S., & Fitrianto, I. (2024). Implementasi Metode Al-Qiyasiyyah Dan Al-Istiqrariyyah Terhadap Pembelajaran Ilmu Nahwu. *IJER: Indonesian Journal of Educational Research*, 216-226.
- Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Corwin Press.
- Julkifli, J., Mastur, M., & Fitrianto, I. (2025). Julkifli, Ibnu Fitrianto Metode Langsung (Thaiqah Mubāsyarah) Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab di Pondok Pesantren Bin Baz Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Al-Fawa'id: Jurnal Agama dan Bahasa*, 15(1), 158-173.
- Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. (2018). *Transformational school leadership effects on student achievement*. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(3), 387-420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11436268>
- Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., & Barber, M. (2010). How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better. McKinsey & Company.
- Mulford, B. (2019). *School leaders: Changing roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness*. OECD.
- Nashihin, H., Rachman, Y. A., & Fitrianto, I. (2025). Empowering creativity of disabled students through sustainable agropreneur education at ainul yakin islamic boarding school in yogyakarta to support the SDGs. *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review*, 5(2), e02878-e02878..
- O'Brien, K., & Howard, P. (2016). The role of education in climate change adaptation: A global perspective. *Climate and Development*, 8(3), 207-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2015.1029855>
- OECD. (2019). *Future of education and skills: OECD learning compass 2030*. OECD Publishing.
- Said, A. H., Fitrianto, I., & Jamilah, H. A. (2022). الأفعال المتعدية بحرف الجرّ في كتاب القراءة الوافية المقرّر للصفّ السادس دلالية/Transgressive verbs (Harf Jar) in the sixth-grade reading book (Grammatical semantic study). *Diwan: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Arab*, 8(1).
- Springett, D., & Foster, K. (2018). *Education for sustainable development: Insights from the context of environmental education*. *Environmental Education Research*, 24(9), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1490913>
- Tikly, L. (2019). *Education for sustainable development in Africa: A critical policy analysis*. *Comparative Education*, 55(2), 177-201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2019.1586199>
- UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. UNESCO Publishing.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.