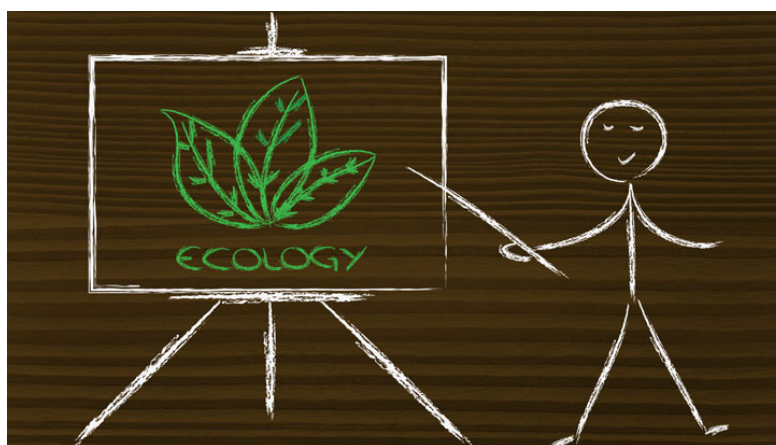


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## How do Future Teachers See the Competences in Education for Sustainable Development?



A study has explored how 32 students of elementary education perceive Education for Sustainable Development. The results show which are the most important aspects in EDS as judged by future teachers, who barely appreciate elements considered important by experts in the field. A lack of connection between the existing theoretical frameworks related to this issue and the real knowledge and views of students is also detected.

Author: iStockphoto/faithiecannoise.

In the context of Higher Education, over 100 universities have signed international declarations and have committed to embedding sustainability within their operations, outreach, education and research. However, despite the declaration of good intentions and policy developments at national, regional and international level, little has been achieved in terms of embedding Education for Sustainable Development holistically in the curriculum. To date, much research has focused on the perceptions and views of university students in relation to sustainable development knowledge, skills and competencies, however few studies have focused on how teacher education students perceive Education for Sustainable Development.

This paper presents a research conducted with 32 teacher education students with the aim to explore their perception of ESD competencies. First, we review existing research related to

learning outcomes, competencies and sustainability literacy. We also suggest a theoretical framework on ESD competencies. Second, we outline the method, the background of the study and the research tool used, a questionnaire distributed to teacher education students to explore their perception in ESD competencies. Third, we introduce the research results, discussion, conclusions and a set of key implications to study the development of ESD competencies amongst teacher education students.

This study provides evidence on the ESD competencies that teacher students would prioritise in a school project related to ESD. They tend to prioritise the acquisition of knowledge and practical skills related to nature and natural sciences, in detriment of other types of learning such as the promotion of ethical values, positive attitudes towards sustainability and the management of emotions among their future primary school students. Students also highlight as relevant aspects related to the environment, the human-environment interaction and its impact, in conjunction with the ability to act, environmental awareness, individual and collective responsibilities and attitudes of respect and care for the environment.

Problem-solving of environmental issues, communication skills, critical thinking or the sense of belonging to the environment are interdisciplinary elements hardly considered by teacher students for their future educational practice, although these elements are considered critical to ESD practice in the literature.

The findings from this study show a disconnection between existing ESD theoretical frameworks related to sustainability or ESD competencies of university students and the actual awareness and views of students in relation to ESD. It seems reasonable to suggest that existing ESD theoretical frameworks need to become more alive and integrated within the existing teacher education curriculum to promote the awareness and development of ESD competencies amongst teacher students. This is critical to ensure ESD integration and practice within all the different levels of education.

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