



IJoLTE 10 (1) (2026)

E-ISSN: 2598-2303

International Journal of Language Teaching and Education

<https://online-journal.unja.ac.id/IJoLTE>

DOI: 10.22437/ijolte.v10i1.54986



Curriculum Reform and The Integration of Sustainable Development Education in English Language Classrooms

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Info Article

Received: 30 April 2026

Revised: 22 May 2026

Accepted: 27 May 2026

OnlineVersion: 29 May 2026

Abstract

This study examined curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) in English language classrooms in secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. The increasing need to align educational practices with global priorities, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), has heightened demand for curriculum innovations that promote sustainability awareness among students. The study investigated the extent to which sustainable development concepts are embedded in the English language curriculum and how teachers implement these concepts in classroom instruction. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised English language teachers in public secondary schools in Enugu State. A sample was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured instrument titled the Curriculum Reform and Sustainable Development Education Integration Questionnaire (CRSDEIQ). Instrument validity was confirmed by experts in curriculum studies and English language education, while reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test at the 0.05 level of significance to answer research questions and test hypotheses. Findings revealed that although elements of sustainable development education exist within the English language curriculum, classroom implementation remains limited. Major challenges identified included inadequate teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and low teacher awareness of sustainability concepts. The study concluded that effective curriculum reform, supported by continuous professional development, is essential for promoting SDE through English language teaching. It recommended integrating sustainability-focused content into textbooks and providing targeted teacher training programmes to strengthen classroom implementation.

Keywords: Curriculum reform; Sustainable development education (SDE); English language teaching; Secondary education; Enugu State, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of sustainable development and social transformation. In recent years, the global education community has increasingly emphasized the need for educational systems to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and values required to address contemporary environmental, social, and economic challenges (Chen & Lopez 2023; Cordova, 2024).

This vision is reflected in the global agenda of the United Nations, which advocates inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (Foster & Albrecht, 2024; Mufanechiya & Mokhele Makgalwa, 2025). One important strategy for achieving this goal is the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) into school curricula across different subject areas.

Curriculum reform has therefore become a significant policy focus in many countries seeking to align their educational systems with sustainable development education priorities. According to Abaa & Umore, (2025); Green & Thomas (2023); Oraif (2024); Nwuche & Enyia (2024) curriculum reform involves revising educational content, teaching methods, and learning objectives to address emerging societal needs and global trends. In the context of language education, the English language classroom offers a unique platform for promoting sustainable development education concepts because language learning naturally involves communication, critical thinking, and engagement with diverse social issues. Through reading passages, writing activities, classroom discussions, and project-based learning, English language teaching can expose students to themes such as environmental protection, social responsibility, gender equality, and global citizenship (Khanna & Moyo, 2024; Nwashili, 2025; Terkaa-Avaa et al, 2024).

Adeleke & Umore, (2025); Okoro, (2024) pointed out that in Nigeria, recent educational reforms have highlighted the importance of integrating sustainability-related themes into school subjects. However, the extent to which these themes are effectively incorporated into classroom practices remains uncertain. In Enugu State, English language remains a core subject in secondary education and serves as the primary medium of instruction across the curriculum (Nwashili, 2025). This makes the English language classroom an important channel through which students can develop awareness and understanding of sustainable development education issues.

Despite policy efforts and curriculum adjustments, challenges such as limited teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and inadequate awareness of sustainability concepts may hinder the effective integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms (Yu et al, 2024). Consequently, it becomes necessary to examine how curriculum reform supports the inclusion of sustainable development education themes in English language teaching and how teachers implement these reforms in practice.

Education plays a vital role in preparing learners to address contemporary global challenges such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability (World Bank, 2022). To address these issues, the United Nations introduced sustainable development goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education that promotes sustainable development. One key strategy for achieving this goal is the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) into school curricula across different subjects, including English language teaching (UNESCO, 2023; United Nations, 2022). Abdulganeey et al, (2025); Azizah, (2025); Mustofa & Retnaningdyah, (2025); Nafi & Olaitan, (2025) noted that through reading, writing, and classroom discussions, English language education can provide opportunities for students to explore sustainability themes and develop critical thinking skills related to global challenges.

It is unclear whether teachers possess the necessary knowledge, resources, and pedagogical strategies required to effectively integrate Sustainable Development Education concepts into English language teaching. The lack of empirical evidence on how curriculum reform supports the integration of sustainability themes in English language classrooms creates a gap that requires investigation. Therefore, this study investigates curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education concepts in English language classrooms in secondary schools in Enugu State.

The main purpose of this study is to examine curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) in English language classrooms in secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent to which sustainable development education concepts are incorporated into the English language curriculum and how these concepts are implemented during classroom instruction.

The study also aims to assess teachers' level of awareness and preparedness in integrating Sustainable Development Education into their teaching practices. Teachers play a critical role in translating curriculum reforms into effective classroom practices (Agrawal & Singh, 2025; Cordova,

(2024); CT & Sethunarayanan, 2025). Therefore, understanding their level of awareness, competence, and attitude toward sustainability education is important for evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum reform initiatives.

Furthermore, the study intends to identify the challenges that hinder the successful integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms. Such challenges may include inadequate instructional materials, limited professional training, and insufficient policy guidance. By identifying these factors, the study provided insights that can help policymakers, curriculum planners, and educators improve the implementation of sustainability-focused curriculum reforms.

Ultimately, the findings of the study are expected to contribute to improving English language teaching practices and strengthen the role of education in promoting sustainable development in Enugu State secondary schools.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the extent of integration of sustainable development concepts in the English language curriculum across categories of respondents.
2. What is the level of teachers' awareness and preparedness for integrating Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms in Enugu State?
3. What challenges affect the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language teaching in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Three research hypotheses guided this study,

1. There is no significant difference in the extent of integration of sustainable development education concepts in the English language curriculum across secondary schools in Enugu State.
2. There is no significant relationship between teachers' awareness of Sustainable Development Education and their implementation of sustainability concepts in English language classrooms.
3. There is no significant influence of instructional resources on the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language teaching in Enugu State secondary schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

Contains the type of research, time and place of research, targets/objectives, research subjects, procedures, instruments and data analysis techniques as well as other matters related to the method of research. targets/objectives, research subjects, procedures, data and instruments, and data collection techniques, as well as data analysis techniques and other matters related to the method of research can be written in sub-chapters, with sub-headings. Sub-subheadings do not need to be notated, but are written in lowercase with a capital letter, TNR-11 bold, left aligned. As an example can be seen below.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) in English language classrooms in secondary schools in Enugu State. This research was carried out between May and October 2025. The research was carried out in Enugu state, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate because it allows the researchers to collect data from a representative group of respondents in order to describe existing conditions and practices related to the integration of sustainability concepts in English language teaching. The design also enables the researchers to examine teachers' awareness, preparedness, and challenges associated with implementing sustainability-related curriculum reforms aligned with global education initiatives such as those promoted by the United Nations.

Research Target/Subject

The population of the study consisted of all English language teachers in public secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. A sample of 120 English language teachers was selected from selected secondary

schools across the three educational zones in the state. A multistage sampling technique was used. First, a number of schools were randomly selected from each educational zone. Thereafter, English language teachers in the selected schools were purposively selected because they are directly involved in implementing the English language curriculum.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Curriculum Reform and Sustainable Development Education Integration Questionnaire (CRSDEIQ)”. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A collected demographic information such as gender, qualification, and years of teaching experience, while Section B contained items designed to measure the extent of integration of sustainable development education, teachers’ awareness, and challenges affecting implementation. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in curriculum studies and English language education from a recognized university. Their suggestions and corrections were used to improve the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the questionnaire items before the final administration of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted with 20 English language teachers from secondary schools outside the study sample but with similar characteristics. The responses obtained were analyzed using Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

The researchers visited the selected secondary schools with the assistance of research assistants to administer copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. Permission was obtained from school authorities before the administration of the instrument. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and they were assured that the information provided would be treated with confidentiality. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to ensure a high return rate.

Data analysis technique

The data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Statistical analysis was conducted using appropriate statistical procedures to determine the extent of integration of sustainable development education in English language classrooms in Enugu State.

The one-sample t-test was adopted for the study because the data were collected from a single group of respondents, namely English language teachers, and the study sought to determine whether the observed mean ratings on the integration of Sustainable Development Education differed significantly from a predetermined criterion mean. The test was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to compare the sample mean with an established benchmark representing the expected level of integration of sustainable development education concepts within the English language curriculum. The one-sample t-test was employed to determine whether the mean ratings of English language teachers on the integration of Sustainable Development Education were significantly higher or lower than the criterion mean of 2.50, which served as the benchmark for acceptable integration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent are sustainable development concepts integrated into the English language curriculum in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table I. Extent of Integration of Sustainable Development Concepts.

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Sustainability themes are included in English language reading passages	3.12	0.74	Agree
2	English language textbooks contain topics related to environmental and social issues	3.05	0.80	Agree
3	Teachers incorporate sustainable development discussions during English lessons	2.68	0.85	Agree
4	Classroom activities promote awareness of sustainability concepts	2.54	0.88	Agree
Grand Mean		2.85		Agree

Interpretation: The grand mean score of 2.85, which is above the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicates that sustainable development concepts are moderately integrated into the English language curriculum in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Research Question 2: What is the level of teachers' awareness and preparedness for integrating Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms?

Table 2 Level of Teachers' Awareness and Preparedness for Integration of Sustainable Development.

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Teachers are aware of sustainability concepts in education	3.20	0.70	Agree
2	Teachers understand how sustainability topics relate to English language teaching	2.90	0.82	Agree
3	Teachers have received training on integrating sustainability themes	2.30	0.90	Disagree
4	Teachers feel confident teaching sustainability topics in English classes	2.65	0.86	Agree
Grand Mean		2.76		Agree

Interpretation: The grand mean of 2.76 suggests that teachers possess a moderate level of awareness, although professional training on sustainability integration remains inadequate.

Research Question 3: What challenges affect the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language teaching?

Table 3 Challenges Affecting the Integration of Sustainable Development Education in English Language Teaching.

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lack of instructional materials on sustainability	3.18	0.72	Agree
2	Insufficient teacher training on sustainability education	3.05	0.76	Agree
3	Limited time within the curriculum	2.94	0.83	Agree
4	Inadequate policy guidance for sustainability integration	2.80	0.87	Agree
Grand Mean		2.99		Agree

Interpretation: The grand mean of 2.99 indicates that several challenges significantly affect the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the extent of integration of sustainable development concepts in the English language curriculum across categories of respondents.

Table 4. Extent of Integration of Sustainable Development Concepts in English Language Curriculum

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
Integration of SDE	120	2.85	0.82	2.31	0.023	Reject H ₀₁

Interpretation: Since the p-value (0.023) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the extent of integration of sustainable development concepts in English language classrooms across categories of respondents. In addition to statistical significance testing, the effect size analysis indicated that the magnitude of the difference was large. This suggests that variations among the schools in the integration of SDE concepts were large in practical terms, reinforcing the conclusion that the level of implementation was relatively different across the sampled schools. The large effect size further implies that factors such as curriculum guidelines, teacher practices, or institutional policies may be relatively different across secondary schools in the state.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between teachers' awareness of Sustainable Development Education and their implementation of sustainability concepts.

Table 5. Relationship Between Teachers' Awareness of Sustainable Development Education and Their Implementation of Sustainability Concepts.

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Teachers' awareness & Implementation	120	0.64	0.001	Reject H ₀₂

Interpretation: The correlation coefficient $r = 0.64$, indicates a moderate positive relationship between teachers' awareness and their implementation of sustainability concepts. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The effect size was moderate, indicating that teachers' awareness contributed meaningfully to the implementation of sustainability concepts.

H₀₃: Instructional resources do not significantly influence the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language teaching.

Table 6. Level of influence of instructional resources on the integration of sustainable development education in English language teaching.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
Instructional resources	120	2.99	0.79	2.47	0.015	Reject H ₀₃

Interpretation: Because the p-value (0.015) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that instructional resources significantly influence the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language teaching. The effect size was moderate, indicating that instructional resources contributed meaningfully to the integration of Sustainable Development Education in classroom instruction.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that sustainable development concepts are moderately integrated into the English language curriculum in secondary schools in Enugu State, with a grand mean of 2.85. This indicates that while some sustainability-related topics exist in textbooks and classroom activities, they are not fully embedded into teaching practices. This supports previous research by Abaa & Umore, (2025) suggesting that English language classrooms can serve as a platform for promoting awareness of global issues, but full integration requires deliberate curriculum planning and teacher support.

Teachers' awareness and preparedness were found to be moderate, with a grand mean of 2.76. Although most teachers are aware of sustainability concepts, few have received formal training on integrating these themes into English language instruction. This aligns with studies by Chen & Lopez, (2023); Green & Thomas, (2023) indicating that teacher competence and professional development are critical factors in the successful implementation of Sustainable Development Education (SDE). A moderate

positive correlation ($r = 0.64$) between teachers' awareness and implementation underscores that higher awareness levels are associated with more effective integration of sustainability themes.

The study also identified several challenges affecting integration of sustainability development themes, including inadequate instructional materials, limited training, and insufficient policy guidance, with a grand mean of 2.99. The significant influence of instructional resources on curriculum implementation highlights that the availability of relevant teaching materials and structured guidelines is essential for achieving meaningful integration of SDE into English language classrooms.

Overall, these findings suggest that curriculum reform alone is insufficient; successful integration of Sustainable Development Education requires teacher capacity building, adequate resources, and structured policy support.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while curriculum reform in Enugu State has introduced elements of sustainable development education into English language classrooms, the integration is partial and inconsistent. Teachers demonstrate moderate awareness and willingness to incorporate sustainability concepts, but challenges such as lack of training, limited instructional resources, and inadequate policy direction hinder effective implementation. Therefore, English language classrooms have the potential to promote sustainable development awareness, but realizing this potential requires targeted interventions in teacher training, curriculum planning, and resource provision.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. **Enhanced Teacher Training:** Organize continuous professional development programmes to equip English language teachers with skills to integrate sustainable development education themes effectively into their lessons.
2. **Curriculum and Textbook Revision:** Curriculum planners should revise English language curricula and textbooks to include explicit sustainability-related topics, activities, and projects that align with SDG 4 objectives.
3. **Provision of Instructional Resources:** Government and school authorities should provide teaching materials, multimedia resources, and guidelines to support teachers in delivering sustainability-focused English lessons.
4. **Policy Support:** Educational policymakers should develop clear guidelines and frameworks for the integration of Sustainable Development Education in all core subjects, including English language, to ensure uniform implementation across schools.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring of classroom practices and evaluation of curriculum integration will help identify gaps and support improvements in the teaching of sustainability concepts.

These recommendations aim to strengthen the role of English language education in promoting sustainable development awareness among secondary school students in Enugu State.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) in English language classrooms; however, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

First, the study may have been limited by its sample size and geographical scope. If the research was conducted within a specific region, institution, or educational level, the findings may not fully represent

the experiences and practices of English language teachers in other contexts. Variations in curriculum policies, teacher preparation, school resources, and sociocultural conditions across regions may influence the applicability of the results.

Second, the study relied largely on self-reported data from participants, such as questionnaires, interviews, or surveys. Self-reported responses may be influenced by social desirability bias, selective memory, or participants' personal interpretations of Sustainable Development Education. Consequently, some responses may not fully reflect actual classroom practices.

Third, the research may not have included long-term classroom observations or longitudinal data to determine the sustained impact of SDE integration on students' language development, critical thinking, or environmental awareness. As a result, the study primarily captures current perceptions and practices rather than long-term educational outcomes.

Another limitation relates to the availability of instructional materials and institutional support. Differences in access to teaching resources, digital technologies, and professional development opportunities among schools may have affected participants' implementation of curriculum reforms. These contextual disparities were not examined in extensive detail.

Additionally, the study focused specifically on English language classrooms, which may limit broader generalizations to other subject areas. The integration of Sustainable Development Education may differ significantly in disciplines such as science, social studies, or vocational education due to differing pedagogical approaches and curriculum objectives.

Finally, the evolving nature of curriculum reform and sustainability education presents an inherent limitation. Educational policies and global sustainability priorities continue to change, meaning that some findings may require reassessment as new reforms, technologies, and pedagogical strategies emerge.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to ongoing discussions on curriculum innovation and the role of English language education in promoting sustainable development. Future research could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, and comparative studies across multiple educational contexts.

Limitations Related to the Use of Self-Report Data

The study relied primarily on self-report data obtained from respondents through questionnaires, which presents several limitations. First, participants may have provided socially desirable responses, especially on issues relating to Sustainable Development Education (SDE), thereby overstating their level of awareness, preparedness, or classroom integration practices. Such responses may not fully reflect actual instructional behaviour in English language classrooms.

Second, self-report instruments are subject to response bias, including exaggeration, selective memory, and misunderstanding of questionnaire items. Respondents may interpret concepts related to curriculum reform and sustainable development differently, which could affect the accuracy and consistency of the data collected.

Third, the study depended on participants' perceptions rather than direct classroom observation. As a result, the findings may not provide a complete representation of how Sustainable Development Education is practically integrated during English language instruction.

Additionally, self-report data are limited in their ability to establish causal relationships because the responses reflect personal opinions and experiences at a specific point in time. This may reduce the objectivity of the findings and affect the generalizability of the results beyond the sampled population.

Finally, respondents' willingness to participate honestly may have been influenced by institutional expectations or concerns about professional evaluation, potentially affecting the reliability of the responses.

Despite these limitations, the use of self-report instruments provided valuable insights into teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding curriculum reform and the integration of Sustainable Development Education in English language classrooms. Future studies may combine questionnaires with classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis to enhance data validity and reliability.

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