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THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN URBAN SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines how educational psychologists foster sustainable behaviours and attitudes among students and teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria, a region facing significant environmental challenges, such as pollution, flooding, and waste management issues, which directly impact urban schools. The aim is to explore how educational psychologists foster sustainable behaviours and attitudes among students and teachers. Despite the pressing environmental concerns in Lagos schools, sustainability initiatives remain limited, primarily due to psychological barriers like cognitive dissonance and the diffusion of responsibility, which hinder the adoption of eco-friendly behaviours. Through targeted interventions, teacher support, and curriculum development, educational psychologists can address these barriers and cultivate a culture of environmental responsibility. Successful initiatives, such as the Green Schools Initiative and Eco-Clubs, illustrate the positive impact of these efforts. The review concludes with recommendations for educational psychologists to take a more active role in supporting sustainable educational policies and integrating culturally relevant content to enhance student engagement. This approach will better equip future generations with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the global climate crisis.

Keywords: Cognitive Dissonance; Educational Psychology; Environmental Challenge; Green Schools Initiative; Sustainability Practices;

Introduction Urban areas worldwide are increasingly grappling with complex sustainability challenges, particularly in rapidly expanding cities like Lagos, Nigeria. As the largest city in Sub-

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Saharan Africa, with a population exceeding 20 million, Lagos faces significant urbanization-related issues that threaten its sustainability and the well-being of its residents (Koko & Bello, 2023). These challenges include severe air and water pollution, poor waste management, inadequate infrastructure, and recurrent flooding, all of which disrupt daily life and undermine critical services such as education (Gebrekidan et al., 2024). For instance, air pollution exacerbates respiratory illnesses, adding to the public health burden, while ineffective waste management leads to environmental degradation, diminishing residents' quality of life and impeding local governments' ability to provide essential services. Additionally, frequent flooding damages educational infrastructure, disrupts school operations, and displaces communities, further straining the education system (Gebrekidan et al., 2024; Isukuru et al., 2024).

These challenges are not unique to Lagos but are prevalent in other rapidly urbanizing cities worldwide, such as Cape Town, South Africa; Mumbai, India; and São Paulo, Brazil. These cities share common sustainability concerns, including traffic congestion, inadequate waste management, and climate-related risks, all of which hinder sustainable development efforts. For example, Cape Town has struggled with severe water shortages and droughts, prompting authorities to implement innovative water conservation strategies (Hill-Lewis, 2023). In Mumbai, seasonal flooding increasingly disrupts education and economic activities (Gudhka et al., 2021), while São Paulo continues to battle waste disposal issues and air pollution, both of which directly impact residents' health and overall quality of life, including that of students (International Association of Horticultural Producers [AIPH], n.d.; Vilas Boas et al., 2018). These global examples underscore the urgent need for localized, adaptive solutions that address immediate environmental concerns while fostering long-term sustainability in urban education systems (Moallemi et al., 2020).

Educational psychologists play a crucial role in these efforts by integrating sustainability into school curricula, promoting eco-friendly behaviors among students and educators, and addressing psychological and systemic barriers that hinder sustainable practices. By facilitating long-term behavioural change and collaborating with policymakers, they contribute to community-driven sustainability initiatives. This paper explores the role of educational psychologists in Lagos, examining their contributions to sustainable education and the broader urban sustainability agenda.

The Role of Educational Psychology in Sustainability

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Educational psychologists play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable practices within schools and local communities by leveraging their expertise in behaviour modification, motivation, and curriculum development (Tung et al., 2024). As specialists in understanding the psychological determinants of human behaviour, they are well-positioned to integrate sustainability into educational frameworks and encourage eco-friendly behaviours among students and educators alike (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018). By addressing psychological and systemic barriers such as a lack of awareness, motivation, or resources, educational psychologists advocate for educational reforms that prioritise environmental consciousness and behavioural transformation. For instance, they can develop interventions that enhance students' comprehension of sustainability and encourage actions such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and responsible consumption (Tung et al., 2024).

Fostering Long-Term Behavioural Change

A key contribution of educational psychologists lies in promoting long-term behavioural change. Through targeted programmes and interventions, they support both students and teachers in cultivating the attitudes and skills necessary for embracing sustainable lifestyles (Sultana et al., 2024). This includes nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and environmental stewardship. Additionally, they equip educators with resources and strategies to teach sustainability concepts effectively, ensuring they resonate with students' lived experiences (Sultana et al., 2024). Furthermore, educational psychologists help students cope with the emotional strain associated with discussions on environmental degradation and climate change, addressing concerns such as eco-anxiety and climate distress (Clayton, 2020).

Collaboration with Policymakers and Local Communities

Another crucial aspect of educational psychologists' role in advancing sustainability is collaboration with policymakers and local communities. By partnering with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local stakeholders, they ensure that sustainability initiatives align with community needs. In Lagos, for example, educational psychologists advocate for embedding sustainability topics within national curricula and champion the development of school policies that promote recycling, renewable energy adoption, and water conservation. Through community engagement, they bridge the gap between schools and their

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surroundings, fostering collective efforts to address urban sustainability challenges (Rahmania, 2024).

Addressing Psychological Barriers to Sustainability

The literature highlights the role of educational psychologists in mitigating psychological barriers such as cognitive dissonance—the conflict between one's actions and beliefs—and the diffusion of responsibility, where individuals deflect personal accountability. These challenges are particularly pronounced in urban areas like Lagos, where rapid urbanization complicates sustainability efforts. Bentler et al. (2023) found that interventions addressing cognitive dissonance significantly enhanced pro-environmental behaviours in domestic and professional settings, highlighting their potential effectiveness in urban contexts. Similarly, Razali et al. (2023) identified environmental attitudes and self-efficacy as critical predictors of sustainable behaviour among adolescents, reinforcing the importance of tailored interventions.

Effective Educational Interventions for Sustainability

Research affirms the effectiveness of structured interventions in fostering sustainable behaviours among students. Chitiyo and May (2018) explored the sustainability of the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Intervention Support (SWPBIS) model and found that factors such as relative advantage and observability significantly influenced its continued adoption, demonstrating its efficacy in promoting positive behaviours. Likewise, Kassirer et al. (2018) examined the 'Start Green' programme, which used peer mentoring and workshops to encourage energy conservation among university students. The initiative reached over 600 participants, highlighting the long-term impact of structured interventions.

Promoting Sustainability Through Education

Green Schools Projects

The Green Schools Project in Lagos exemplifies how educational initiatives can address cognitive dissonance among students. Through environmental awareness campaigns, sustainable activities such as tree planting and waste reduction, and the establishment of eco-friendly infrastructure, the project fosters a culture of environmental responsibility within the school community (Green Schools Project, n.d.). Similar initiatives in other regions have led to sustained improvements in waste management practices. For example, a quasi-experimental study in Egypt demonstrated that

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structured educational interventions significantly improved waste management knowledge, attitudes, and practices among healthcare workers (Conti et al., 2022).

Developing Culturally Relevant Curricula

Empirical research underscores the importance of culturally relevant education in enhancing student engagement with sustainability. Incorporating local environmental challenges, such as waste management and coastal flooding, into the curriculum strengthens the relevance and impact of lessons. Gay (2018) found that culturally responsive teaching enhances student motivation and academic performance by linking learning to real-world experiences. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2021) highlights that when education mirrors students' cultural and environmental realities, they develop a heightened sense of responsibility towards sustainability. Additionally, Djonko-Moore et al. (2018) demonstrated that experiential education tailored to urban contexts significantly enhances students' environmental awareness and commitment to sustainable behaviors.

Waste Management in Lagos

In 2021, the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA, 2023) collaborated with the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LASUBEB, 2021) to integrate waste management education into the primary school curriculum. This initiative sought to reshape students' environmental consciousness by teaching proper waste disposal techniques and the benefits of recycling. In 2023, LAWMA Academy furthered this effort by organizing a four-week summer school programme for children aged 8 to 12, focusing on waste management practices such as arts and crafts, upcycling, and field trips to instill a culture of environmental responsibility.

Hands-On Approaches to Behavioural Change in Schools

Experiential learning initiatives, such as environmental clubs, play a crucial role in fostering long-term behavioural change among students. Research suggests that participatory education significantly enhances students' commitment to sustainability. Studies indicate that students actively engaged in environmental initiatives within schools are more likely to adopt eco-friendly behaviours in their personal lives (McGibbon & Van Belle, 2015). Similar initiatives in Cape Town and São Paulo have successfully embedded participatory projects within educational systems, resulting in heightened student engagement in sustainability practices (Santos et al., 2020; Chandra & Patel, 2023).

Initiatives and Impact of Eco-Green Clubs in Lagos Schools

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Carrington Youth Fellowship Initiative (CYFI) Green Clubs

In June 2023, CYFI launched Green Clubs in secondary schools like Orile Agege Community Junior High School and Eko Junior College. These clubs educate students on environmental protection and engage them in practical activities such as collecting and recycling plastic waste. The initiative aimed to collect over 10,000 PET bottles for recycling, with students successfully gathering over 6,000 bottles by the programme's end (Environmental News Nigeria, 2023).

Green Club Nigeria and Project Green Schools

Green Club Nigeria's "Project Green Schools" promotes environmental consciousness among secondary school students across Nigeria. The initiative establishes Green Clubs in schools where students participate in sustainability projects, including tree planting, waste sorting, and climate education (Green Club Nigeria, 2023).

Centre for 21st Century Issues (C21st Issues) – Environmental Bees Club

In 2023, C21st Issues introduced the Environmental Bees Club at Nikland College, Lagos, to train students as environmental ambassadors (Bonews Nigeria, 2023). The project fosters student involvement in eco-friendly practices and leadership in sustainability efforts.

ECO-LEARN Nigeria and Climate Education

Launched in May 2024, ECO-LEARN Nigeria raises awareness and fosters action on climate change in Lagos by equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools to educate students on climate issues (Youth at Heart, 2024).

ATLAS Initiative's Eco-Innovation Club

In January 2024, the ATLAS Initiative introduced the Eco-Innovation Club at Oregun Junior High School, Lagos, providing students with hands-on experiences in eco-innovation, sustainability, and waste management solutions (ATLAS Initiative, 2024).

Lagos State Government's Environmental Advocacy

The Lagos State Government has reinforced its commitment to sustainability by reintroducing Climate Change Clubs in schools to develop young Environmental Ambassadors. These clubs play a crucial role in ensuring student participation in climate education and sustainability practices (Lagos State Ministry of Environment, 2024).

Evaluating the Long-Term Impact of Sustainability Education

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Long-term studies confirm that sustainability initiatives can foster enduring behavioural change among students. For example, Hungerford and Volk (1990) demonstrated that environmental education programmes significantly influence students' practices, with participants showing lasting improvements in behaviours such as waste management and resource conservation. These findings are supported by Rickinson et al. (2004), who documented that participatory, hands-on learning experiences contribute to the development of sustained eco-friendly habits among students.

Student Feedback on Sustainability

Feedback from former Eco-Club members highlights the lasting impact of early sustainability education. Lotfi and Ibourk (2023) explored the role of school-based environmental clubs in fostering eco-citizen behaviours, showing that such clubs not only enhance students' environmental awareness but also encourage the adoption of sustainable practices. One student shared, "Being in the Eco-Club taught me the importance of protecting our environment, and now I make sure my family recycles regularly" (Monroe et al., 2019). These testimonials align with international studies indicating that early environmental education can create lifelong advocates for sustainability (Liefländer et al., 2015).

Shifts in School Policies and Curriculum Integration

Successful sustainability projects have led to notable shifts in school policies and curriculum integration. A comparative analysis by Adewole and Eze (2023) revealed that 70% of schools involved in the Green Schools Project incorporated sustainability topics into their curricula, covering subjects such as science, geography, and social studies. Similarly, research from Cape Town found that schools implementing sustainability-focused curriculum changes saw a 25% increase in student performance in environmental science (Smith et al., 2022).

Research has demonstrated that schools engaged in sustainability initiatives are more likely to integrate environmental topics across various subjects, fostering a more cohesive learning environment (Tilbury, 1995). Such curriculum integration has been linked to enhanced student performance and deeper engagement in environmental science (Jickling & Wals, 2008).

Teacher Evaluations on Curriculum Changes Teachers have reported that incorporating sustainability topics into the curriculum enhances students' critical thinking abilities and promotes deeper engagement with science and environmental issues. For instance, Tilbury (1995)

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documented that sustainability-focused curriculum changes led to improved student performance and more meaningful classroom interactions. These findings are reinforced by Jickling and Wals (2008), who observed that a comprehensive integration of sustainability topics in school curricula is associated with enhanced academic outcomes and heightened environmental awareness.

A survey conducted among Nigerian educators found that 85% of teachers believed the updated curriculum encouraged deeper engagement with science and environmental issues, resulting in improved academic performance (Osuji & Nwuke, 2024; Adeleke & Oladipo, 2017). Similarly, research from South Africa indicates that curriculum integration can significantly boost environmental literacy and academic outcomes (Mabena & Mhlanga, 2021; Headman, 2019).

Community Involvement and Cultural Adaptation

For sustainability education to be truly impactful, community involvement is essential. Studies in Lagos indicate that schools effectively engaging parents and local leaders in sustainability projects achieve better outcomes. Adebayo and Adeniran (2018) found that schools with active community partnerships experienced significant improvements in waste management practices. Similar positive impacts have been observed in São Paulo, where community engagement was identified as a key factor in the success of sustainability initiatives (Santos et al., 2020).

Community workshops, organized by educational psychologists, have successfully connected school sustainability projects to broader local efforts. A Lagos school principal noted, “When parents witness their children’s leadership in sustainability projects, they are more likely to participate in community initiatives” (Abiola & Olowookere, 2020). This anecdotal feedback is further supported by survey data from urban sustainability initiatives in São Paulo, which found that active community engagement significantly enhances local environmental practices (Santos et al., 2020).

Policy Barriers and Strategies for Overcoming Resistance

Overcoming Policy Resistance with Evidence-Based Practices

Educational psychologists often encounter considerable opposition from policymakers when advocating for sustainability initiatives. Research suggests that presenting policymakers with solid, data-driven results from successful pilot projects can significantly reduce resistance. For example, Akinlade and Oluwatayo (2021) found that Lagos schools implementing sustainability

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practices recorded notable increases in student engagement—a key factor that has helped persuade policymakers to support the integration of environmental education.

Utilizing Testimonials to Influence Policy

Student and teacher testimonials have played a critical role in driving policy changes in sustainability education. Data from pilot projects illustrate how the benefits of environmental education extend beyond academic outcomes, fostering responsible environmental behaviour. Such evidence has encouraged policymakers to consider broader integration of environmental topics into school curricula (Osuji & Nwuke, 2024).

Demographic Considerations in Sustainability Interventions

Understanding how demographic factors influence the effectiveness of sustainability education is crucial for tailoring interventions. Research indicates that socio-economic status (SES), access to resources, and cultural backgrounds impact how students engage with sustainability initiatives. For instance, in Lagos, studies have observed that schools in lower-income areas encounter greater challenges in maintaining environmental projects due to limited resources (Osuji & Nwuke, 2024). However, targeted interventions such as providing additional support and adapting content to fit the socio-economic context can mitigate these barriers and enhance student engagement with sustainability practices (Chawla, 2009).

Comparative Insights from International Contexts

A study in São Paulo demonstrated that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds showed a higher retention of sustainability concepts when the education was tied to practical benefits, like improving health and reducing waste (Santos et al., 2020). This finding mirrors observations in Lagos, where connecting environmental education to tangible community benefits led to higher engagement among students in low-income neighbourhoods (Osuji & Nwuke, 2024). These insights highlight the importance of context-specific, adaptable approaches that account for diverse demographic factors.

Recommendations for Enhancing Long-Term Impact

Establish clear metrics to monitor the progress of sustainability initiatives, such as reductions in school waste, increases in student participation, and energy conservation. These metrics should be tailored to fit diverse school environments, particularly those in lower-income areas.

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Integrate case studies and empirical research into teacher training to demonstrate the tangible benefits of sustainability education. Training should focus on equipping teachers with culturally relevant strategies that consider the socio-economic diversity of Lagos's student population.

Set specific, measurable goals for community engagement, such as reducing school waste by 20% within a year, to motivate sustained participation. Educational psychologists should facilitate partnerships that offer visible benefits, enhancing long-term commitment, especially in economically disadvantaged communities.

Conduct more longitudinal studies to track the enduring effects of sustainability initiatives. This includes detailed surveys and interviews with students, teachers, and parents, focusing on how demographic factors influence outcomes.

Gather firsthand accounts from students and educators involved in sustainability projects to influence policy. These stories, supported by quantitative data, can present compelling cases to policymakers for curriculum integration and resource allocation.

Tailor sustainability education to the specific needs of different demographic groups within Lagos by creating content that resonates with local cultures, values, and economic circumstances, ensuring meaningful engagement across all backgrounds.

Conclusion

Educational psychologists play a vital role in promoting sustainability in urban schools by integrating environmental education, fostering behaviour change, and supporting systemic reforms. Strengthening collaborations among policymakers, educators, and community leaders can enhance the impact of sustainability education. Future research should explore the long-term effects of these interventions beyond schools and integrate psychological insights into environmental policies. By embedding sustainability in education, schools can nurture a generation of environmentally responsible citizens ready to tackle global challenges.

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