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Promoting Sustainability Through Foreign Language Education: A Framework for Integration

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Abstract

This paper introduces an intermediate-level English program at a mid-sized private university in Japan that integrates Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into foreign language education through content-based learning and an inquiry-driven approach. The program encouraged students to engage in research cycles on topics such as water scarcity, gender equality, and social justice, fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. To support students, the program incorporated scaffolding techniques, enabling them to conduct research, analyse authentic materials, and present findings effectively in English. While transitioning to a sustainability-focused curriculum posed challenges—such as limited research skills and difficulties in accessing authentic resources—students demonstrated significant improvement in their linguistic competence, understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and engagement with global issues. The study underscores the importance of institutional support, adequate teacher training, and reflective practices for the successful implementation of ESD in language education. By embedding sustainability into curricula, language programs can promote sustainability literacy, intercultural competence, and global citizenship, ultimately preparing students to address global challenges in meaningful ways.

Keywords: ESD, CLIL, global citizenship, learner autonomy, SDGs