



Experiential and Reflective Learning for Sustainable Tourism Mindsets in Higher Education

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of higher education's role in promoting sustainable development necessitates innovative pedagogical approaches that cultivate critical thinking, ethical awareness, and practical skills among students. This action research investigates how experiential and reflective learning fosters sustainable tourism mindsets in international postgraduate students. The study was conducted within a postgraduate course on Tourism Policy, Planning, and Sustainable Management, incorporating classroom discussions, group projects, community-based learning, and reflective exercises. Thirty-one students engaged in activities such as community engagement, policy proposal projects, reflective journaling, and visual mapping. Qualitative data were collected through reflective journals, post-course surveys, and visual documentation and were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed three major outcomes: (1) a cognitive shift from perceiving tourism primarily as an economic activity to recognizing its environmental, cultural, and social impacts; (2) enhanced emotional engagement and empathy through direct community interaction; and (3) the intention to adopt sustainable practices in future careers. The research demonstrates that well-structured experiential and reflective learning environments can transform students' perceptions, foster global competencies, and embed sustainability principles in tourism education. This paper presents a pedagogical model for integrating sustainability into higher-education curricula in culturally diverse contexts, offering insights for educators and policymakers seeking to develop future-ready graduates capable of advancing sustainable tourism globally.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Education, Experiential Learning, Reflective Learning, Higher Education, Global Competence