

Symposium

Sustainable Higher Education in East Asia: Policies, Practices, Developments

Abstract

Bringing together scholars from the East Asian region, the symposium engages research practitioners in rethinking their ideas about sustainable higher education (HE) research in light of the authentic traditions related to universities' implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By extension, the panel (1) critically examines and theoretically inquires on the localized HE approaches that reflect culturally sensitive intellectual traditions of sustainable HE; (2) discusses possibilities that inform Euro-American sustainability frameworks. The symposium aims to launch a dialogue between East Asian scholars on authentic concepts, approaches, and practices that provide potentially new frameworks, categories of thought and praxis of HE sustainability grounded in the different cultural contexts.

1. Objectives of the symposium

The panel aims to (1) launch a dialogue between East Asian scholars on authentic concepts, approaches, and practices of sustainable HE; and (2) provide potentially new frameworks, categories of thought and praxis of HE sustainability grounded in the different cultural contexts

3. Scholarly or scientific significance

Bringing together scholars from the East Asian region, the panel engages research practitioners in rethinking their ideas about sustainable education research in light of the East Asian educational systems and the panel (a) critically examines and theoretically inquires on the local approaches and practices in the HE systems that reflect East Asian intellectual traditions of sustainability education that propel sustainable development.

2. Overview of the presentations

The symposium is based on the joint 'Sustainable Higher Education in Asia' research project and its resulting publications: special issue of the Asia-Pacific Educational Review Journal; and an edited volume Sustainable Tertiary Education in Asia: Policies, Practices, and Developments (Springer). The presentation includes three selected research papers that lie in the field of sustainable higher education and discusses possibilities that inform Western frameworks of sustainable higher education

4. Structure of the symposium

The panel is focused on a selected group of three research papers from Japan, Hong Kong SAR, and Taiwan concerning the research issues surrounding studies on sustainable HE in the East Asian region.

5. Presentations

Paper 1 Abstract

Integrating sustainability themes for enhancing interdisciplinarity: a case study of a comprehensive research university in Japan

Dr. Jing Liu , Tohoku University, Japan

This case study explores how integrating sustainability issues can enhance interdisciplinary teaching and learning in non-environmentally related university courses, where sustainability is not a primary learning objective. Using Biggs' comprehensive model of higher education teaching and learning, the study analyzes a postgraduate course at a Japanese research university through four perspectives: students' perspectives, learning environment, learning process, and learning outcomes. Data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with instructors and learners reveal that incorporating sustainability themes fosters collaboration among students and instructors from diverse disciplines, strengthening learners' abilities to integrate knowledge and communicate across backgrounds. The paper discusses both achievements and barriers of this approach and highlights the complementary relationship between sustainability and interdisciplinarity as a means to innovate higher education teaching and prepare students for a sustainable future.

Paper 2 Abstract

Education for 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in Hong Kong public universities

Dr. Tamara Savelyeva, The Abu Dhabi University, UAE

The paper analyzes the process of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by Hong Kong public universities and describes how universities advance their institutional sustainability during the times of social and political changes in Hong Kong. Guided by the Higher Education Sustainability Model, this post-empiricist qualitative study contributes to the emerging research arena of Education for Sustainable Development Goals (ESDGs) by (1) identifying three distinct features of the universities' SDGs implementation framework—Perception of Sustainability, Institutional Rationalization, and Educational Mechanisms; and (2) stressing crucial role of cultural tradition, and stakeholders' joint participation and collaboration in fostering consequential education actions to ensure consequential SDGs-related transformation.

Paper 3 Abstract

Reconfiguring SDG Learning and Civic Engagement in Higher Education: USR and GCED Perspectives from Taiwan

Dr. Robin Jung-Cheng Chen, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

Dr. Shi-Huei Ho, Ming Chuan University, Taiwan

This panel paper reexamines the relationship between Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) learning and civic engagement in higher education from a configurational perspective. Drawing on the context of University Social Responsibility (USR) initiatives in Taiwan, the study argues that civic engagement is not uniformly associated with SDG learning outcomes. Instead, variations emerge according to how knowledge, attitudes, and skills are aligned within students' learning experiences. Building on empirical findings from Taiwanese universities, the paper proposes a conceptual reinterpretation of the SDG–USR–GCED relationship. In this framework, SDGs function as the content of sustainability learning, USR provides the context for experiential engagement, and Global Citizenship Education (GCED)

serves as an integrative mechanism connecting cognition, values, and action. The discussion highlights the importance of alignment among learning dimensions rather than isolated competency development. The paper contributes to ongoing debates on sustainability education and offers implications for curriculum design, civic learning, and higher education policy in Asia.