

Embedding UN Sustainable Development Goals into an undergraduate Academic English Curriculum at an Irish-Chinese Partnership College

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EAP for a more Sustainable World: BALEAP PIM, Oxford Brookes University
3rd March 2023

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Context of Project



- University College Dublin (UCD) released the *UCD Strategy 2020 to 2024: Rising to the Future* in early 2021. Theme One is 'Creating a Sustainable Global Society'.
- Seed funding awarded to co-ordinators of EAP modules at Beijing-Dublin International College (BDIC) to develop a fully-integrated undergraduate Year One curriculum built around the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Curriculum designed by module co-ordinators in Dublin and implemented by teaching co-ordinator and teaching team in Beijing.



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



Goals of Project



- to provide a meaningful and authentic context within which students can develop their Academic English skills.
- to encourage students to consider how their learning in their own academic disciplines can be applied to solving real-world international problems.
- to establish a shared body of knowledge enabling cultural literacy.
- to help students develop their critical thinking skills.
- to promote global citizenship.

Goals of Project



4

Goal 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

10

Targets

8

Publications

28

Events

1560

Actions

[More info](#)

Target 4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through **education for sustainable development** and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Overview of Curriculum



Semester One: **English for University Studies**

Key Assessments:

- Group Discussion based on reading of articles about fast fashion: prompts to discuss different issues and possible solutions.
- 750-to-1,000-word Argument Essay on topic of sustainable fashion (SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production).
- Reading and Listening assessments use sources that address issues related to sustainable development.



Overview of Curriculum



Semester Two English for General Academic Purposes

Key Assessments

- 1,000-word report based on research into an issue related to one of the SDGs.

Students choose an issue to research in groups. They create surveys to find out about their classmates' understanding of and attitude towards this issue. They then individually write a report to share their findings.

- 5-to-10 minute individual presentation on limitations of the research undertaken and possible future directions.
- Reading and Listening assessments use sources that address issues related to sustainable development.




Semester One

Responsible Consumption and Production: Fast Fashion



- In Semester One, in-depth guided study of one issue related to SDG 12 is intended to scaffold students' more independent study in Semester Two.
- Sustainability introduced implicitly rather than explicitly at this stage.
- The topic of fast fashion is easy to connect to students' own behaviours – eg. big shopping events in China such a 1111 fall within the semester.

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- Focus on critical thinking: eg. students are introduced to rental fashion; at first, may assume it's a potential solution but through research discover it can create even more problems
 - aim to get beyond 'fast fashion bad'/'slow fashion good' dichotomy
 - concession and rebuttal explicitly taught
 - topic encourages students to learn about systems thinking – impact of whole process of clothes production and import/export

Challenges



– Sensitivity required around potential political issues related to the topic:

e.g. in researching greenwashing, students may feel anxious about criticizing a particular company or brand.

– Tendency to offer very general solutions:

e.g. ‘The government should develop a policy...’: however, in Chinese context, it can be difficult for students to look at existing policies and then evaluate them impartially.



Semester Two

Report on SDG Research Project



– Most popular SDGs to research are 1, 4, 5 & 13.

– Example question:

To what extent do BDIC students believe gender affects choice of college major?

– Methodology encourages high degree of student autonomy throughout semester

– Students develop more nuanced understanding of sustainability – not just environmental but also economic and social perspectives





Challenges

- Students face the complexity of writing a report very early in their academic careers – e.g. integrating and synthesizing sources into a literature review, relating this to research question, reporting on data.
- Need in class to focus most on writing and less on conducting the survey.
- Using keywords for searching for sources is not intuitive for students.

Gains



- The projects prepare students for Stage Two, where the focus of their EAP classes is more directly on sourcing, reading and integrating fully academic peer-reviewed articles into their writing.
- Project-based learning enables students to work both collaboratively and independently.
- Students develop key academic skills: e. g. keyword searching and evaluating findings.



Gains



- Students develop language skills: e. g. lexis related to sustainability as well as functional language of problem-solution, cause-effect etc.
- Subject lecturers have given feedback on increased student autonomy, ability to take a position, and critical evaluation.



Further Perspectives



Education for Sustainability is a growing field but still relatively unexplored in relation to EAP.

Smaniotto et al. (2020) found that Italian university students had little knowledge of SDGs but were highly interested in them – especially those related to the environment

‘Student-centred teaching and a more international perspective can help to address the SDGs in a more meaningful way.’

Woźniak, M. (2022), p. 601

‘When language learners are autonomous, when they are well motivated [...], and when intrinsic and extrinsic factors are considered, language learning is much more enjoyable, and sustainability may be achieved.’

Esfandiari, R. and Hesani, S. (2019), p. 135

Next Steps



This model has been replicated – with some adaptation – at UCD’s other partnership colleges in China: Chang’an-Dublin International College (CDIC) and Guangzhou-Dublin International College (GDIC).

We plan to interview students and teachers about their experience of using this SDG-based curriculum with a view to preparing an article for publication.

Further adaptations will be made based on teacher and student feedback.

Our hope is to help equip graduates to thrive in present and future societies.

References



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