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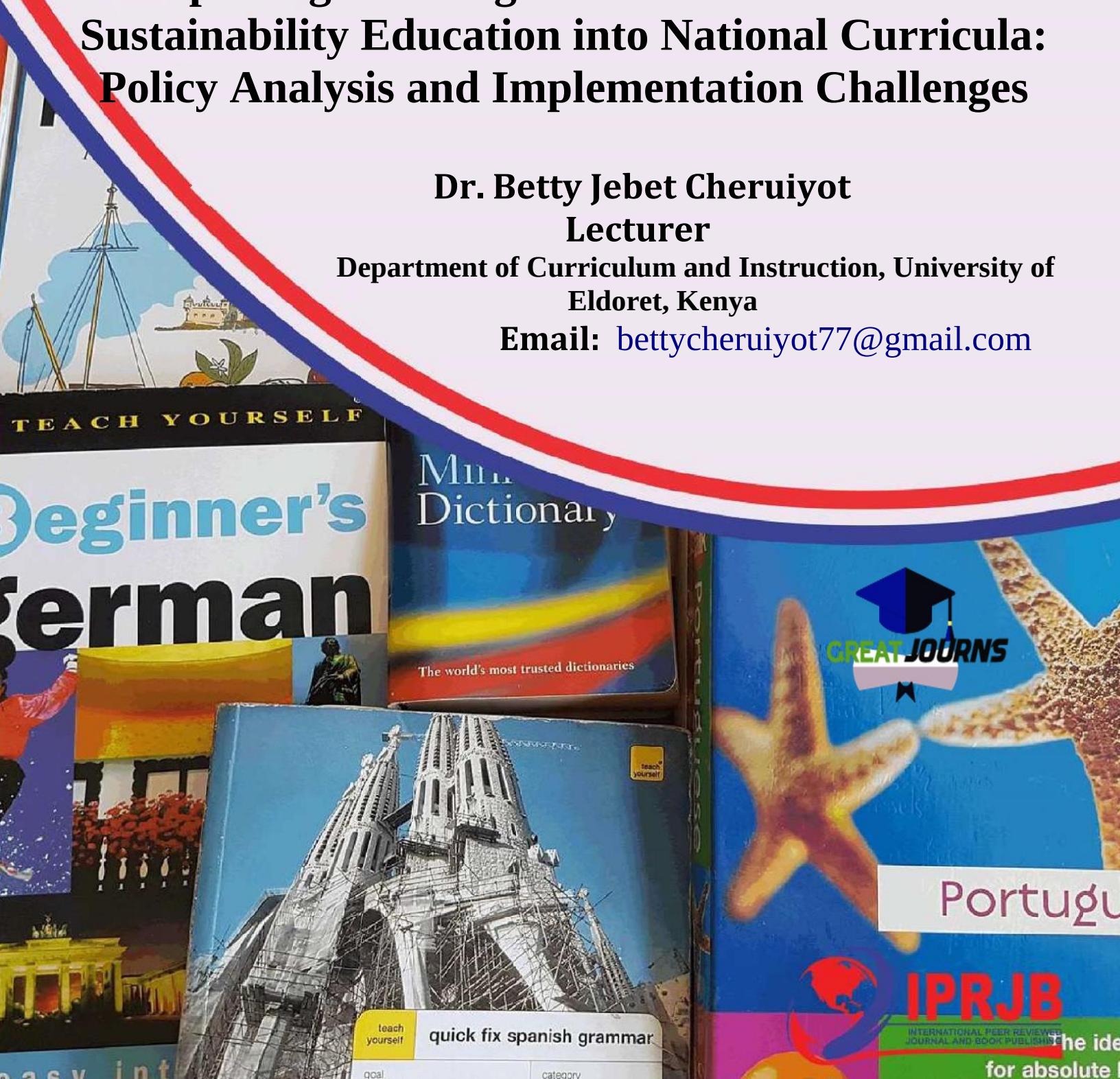
Exploring the Integration of Environmental Sustainability Education into National Curricula: Policy Analysis and Implementation Challenges

Dr. Betty Jebet Cheruiyot
Lecturer
Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Eldoret, Kenya
Email: bettycheruiyot77@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the integration of environmental sustainability education into national curricula, with a focus on policy analysis and implementation challenges. It examined the contemporary landscape of environmental education, assessed prevailing policy frameworks, and identified obstacles to embedding sustainability concepts in educational systems. Employing a mixed-method approach that included policy analysis and stakeholder interviews, the research aimed to offer comprehensive insights into the efficacy of existing practices. With a sample size of 58 respondents comprising policymakers, curriculum developers, educators, and administrators, the study aimed to provide stakeholders with effective strategies for advancing environmental sustainability education across educational institutions. The research employed a descriptive survey design to gather data, utilizing structured questionnaires and interviews to capture diverse perspectives and experiences.

Key Words: ***Environmental sustainability, national curricula, policy analysis, implementation challenges, education, sustainability education***

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability education has emerged as a significant concern among scholars and professionals in the field of education, as well as policymakers and environmental advocates. Integrating environmental sustainability into national curricula involves incorporating activities and topics that educate students about environmental issues, sustainable practices, and the importance of preserving natural resources for future generations. This type of education aims to raise awareness, foster critical thinking, and encourage responsible behaviors toward the environment.

The process of integrating environmental sustainability into educational curricula involves anticipating future environmental challenges and preparing students to address them effectively. According to Sterling (2020), environmental sustainability education encompasses how educators and policymakers assess the current state of environmental education within school systems and develop strategies to enhance its presence in the curricula. It is a continuous process where educational institutions strive to provide relevant information and resources to support the teaching and learning of sustainability concepts.

A study conducted by Tilbury (2018) demonstrated that environmental sustainability education is essential for ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle environmental issues. Furthermore, Tilbury highlighted the importance of developing comprehensive plans to integrate sustainability into all aspects of education, from classroom instruction to extracurricular activities.

Vare and Scott (2018) viewed environmental sustainability education as a transformative process through which educational systems evolve to address pressing environmental concerns. By embedding sustainability into the core of national curricula, schools play a pivotal role in shaping environmentally conscious citizens who are capable of contributing to a sustainable future.

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II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, Jackson and Schuler (2020) conducted a study on forecasting demand and supply in sustainability education planning. The research focused on advanced statistical procedures to project future educational needs, including the number and types of educators required. Factors considered in their analysis included the demand for educational services, budget constraints, turnover rates, technological advancements, and decisions to enhance educational quality. Their findings underscored the importance of strategic workforce planning to meet future educational demands effectively.

In Sweden, Eriksson (2018) conducted a comprehensive study on the integration of sustainable development into the national curriculum, focusing on policy frameworks and implementation challenges. The research aimed to analyze how Swedish educational policies incorporated principles of sustainable development across educational institutions nationwide (Eriksson, 2018). Using a mixed-methods approach, Eriksson combined qualitative case studies and quantitative surveys to gather comprehensive data. The qualitative component involved in-depth analysis of policy documents and interviews with policymakers and educators to understand the nuances of implementation challenges and strategies. Quantitative surveys assessed the impact of sustainability education on key educational outcomes such as student engagement, academic achievement, and environmental awareness. Findings from Eriksson's study highlighted that effective integration of sustainable development education positively influenced various educational dimensions. Strategic initiatives such as curriculum development and teacher training ensured alignment of educational practices with sustainability goals, enhancing student engagement and fostering deeper awareness of environmental issues among Swedish students.

In Saudi Arabia, Ibrahim and Elrehail, (2022) explored strategic planning practices and policy analysis in sustainability education. Their study emphasized the role of strategic forecasting, skills assessment, and succession planning in enhancing organizational agility within educational institutions. They highlighted that agile education practices facilitate innovation and responsiveness to environmental changes, thereby contributing to sustainable performance and competitive advantage in the education sector.

In Spain, Sanchez (2019) investigated the challenges associated with implementing sustainability education into national curricula. The study identified external factors such as government policies, economic conditions, technological advancements, and market competition, along with internal factors like funding constraints, organizational structure, and workforce turnover. Sanchez's research provided insights into the complexities and barriers faced by educational institutions in integrating sustainability education initiatives effectively.

In South Africa, Adams and Smith (2020) conducted a qualitative study examining the integration of environmental education into the South African school curriculum. The research focused on analyzing policy frameworks, exploring implementation challenges, and assessing the impact on student learning outcomes. The study highlighted the critical need for aligning the curriculum with sustainability goals to effectively enhance environmental awareness among students. It underscored the role of comprehensive teacher training programs in promoting sustainable practices and fostering environmental stewardship among South African youth.

In Nigeria, Ogunleye et al. (2018) undertook a policy analysis on sustainability education in Nigeria, employing a mixed-methods approach. The study delved into government policies, institutional frameworks, and strategies for implementing sustainability education initiatives. Findings revealed discrepancies in policy coherence and implementation effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of robust policy frameworks to support sustainable development through education. The research recommended enhancing policy integration and institutional collaboration to foster holistic sustainability practices across Nigerian educational systems.

In Ghana, Amoako et al. (2019) investigated community engagement in environmental education initiatives within Ghanaian schools. Using participatory research methods, the study explored community perceptions, levels of involvement, and the impact of collaborative efforts on environmental sustainability outcomes. The research highlighted the pivotal role of community partnerships in promoting sustainable practices and fostering environmental consciousness among students. Findings emphasized the necessity of inclusive community engagement strategies to address local environmental challenges and empower communities towards sustainable development.

In Kenya, according to Chikati, (2019) the study investigated the implementation of integrated environmental education in the secondary school curriculum for managing environmental degradation in Machakos Sub-County. The study was informed by Fullan's theory of educational change (1991, revised 2006, 2007), which posits that characteristics of change (clarity, complexity, quality, and practicality) influence teachers' and students' environmental literacy (awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, participation).The study employed a cross-sectional survey design using a quantitative approach. Probability sampling designs were used to select participants, including public secondary schools, principals, teachers, and Form 4 students from Machakos Sub-County. Data collection instruments included questionnaires and document analysis schedules. Quantitative analysis techniques, including the t-test statistic at a 0.05 significance level, were used to analyze data. Findings indicated that both teachers' and students' perceptions of integrated environmental education in the secondary school curriculum were generally weak, leading to inadequate integration of environmental education (EE) and limited involvement in EE implementation. This situation negatively impacted environmental sustainability efforts, particularly regarding climate change and land degradation topics. The study recommended that the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) increase the inclusion of EE topics in the curriculum and that the Ministry of Education establish clear environmental policies for schools

III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Research Design

The research study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the challenges and implementation of environmental sustainability education within national curricula. This design was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive overview of current policies and practices, allowing for broader insights into the integration of sustainability education across educational systems.

3.2 Target Population

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) defined a population as a set of individual cases or objects with common observable characteristics. This is the population to which a researcher liked to generalize results of a study. The target population for this study includes policymakers, curriculum

developers, educators, and administrators at various levels of the education system involved in shaping and implementing policies related to environmental sustainability education within national curricula.

Table 3.1 Target Population

Respondent Categories	Target Population
Policymakers	25
Curriculum Developers	40
Educators	55
Administrators	80
Total	**200**

3.3 Sampling procedure and sample size

The study employed a combination of stratified sampling and simple random sampling to select respondents. Stratified sampling involved dividing the target population into distinct groups or strata based on their roles: policymakers, curriculum developers, educators, and administrators. This method ensured representation from each subgroup relevant to environmental sustainability education policy implementation within national curricula. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select participants. The sample size was determined to ensure sufficient statistical power and manageability. Following recommendations by experts in research methodology (Saunders et al., 2009), a sample size of 58 respondents was targeted, distributed as follows: 7 policymakers, 12 curriculum developers, 17 educators, and 22 administrators.

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Table 3.2 Sample Size

Respondent Categories	Target Population	Sample Size
Policymakers	25	7
Curriculum Developers	40	12
Educators	55	17
Administrators	80	22
Total	**200**	**58**

3.3 Data Collection Document

3.4 Questionnaires

The questionnaire designed for this study is structured into two parts, A and B. Part A gathers background information about respondents and their educational institutions, omitting specific geographic references. Part B comprises three sections: Section 1 explores perceptions of the impact of environmental sustainability education policies on curriculum planning; Section 2 assesses awareness levels regarding the integration of sustainability into educational practices. Respondents utilize a slanted Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) to gauge attitudes and perceptions. This scale was chosen for its ability to efficiently measure diverse viewpoints on environmental sustainability education, ensuring clarity and reliability in data collection across multiple dimensions.

3.4.1 Interview

For this study, structured face-to-face interviews were employed to complement the questionnaire data, facilitating deeper exploration of perspectives on environmental sustainability education policy integration into national curricula. This method allowed researchers to probe further into educational administrators' insights, enhancing the study's data richness and providing nuanced perspectives to complement quantitative findings from the questionnaires.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

3.5.1 Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted in similar educational settings within Kenya. Test-retest methods were employed to assess the consistency of the questionnaire and interview protocols. This pilot study involved a small sample of schools within the study area. Reliability, in this context, measures the extent to which the research instruments yield consistent results over repeated administrations (Divivedi, 2007). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient will be calculated to determine the test-retest reliability coefficient. A minimum reliability coefficient value of 0.50 is set as the benchmark to ascertain the reliability of the instruments.

3.5.2 Validity of Research Instruments

Validity is paramount as it determines the extent to which the research instruments measure what they intend to measure. It ensures that the differences observed in the data accurately reflect the differences among the variables being studied (Kothari, 2019). Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) define validity as the degree to which the results from data analysis represent the phenomenon under investigation. To enhance the validity of the research instruments, consultations were conducted with relevant experts in the field. Their insights and guidance ensured that the instruments effectively measure the intended constructs in the context of the study.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Prior to conducting the research, the researcher obtained authorization from the university and sought permission from the relevant authorities. The researcher obtained consent from the school administration to conduct research within the selected schools. Copies of the questionnaires were personally administered to the respondents, ensuring they understood the instructions before filling out the questionnaire. Participants were assured that the information provided would be kept confidential and used solely for the study. Adequate time was given to the participants to respond to the items in the questionnaires. The researcher personally collected the questionnaires to gauge the degree of response. Ethical considerations were addressed by assuring participants that their

information would be used exclusively for research purposes and not to compromise their integrity or interests. Respondents were advised not to indicate their names on the questionnaires to ensure anonymity.

3.6 Method of data presentation and Analysis

The data collected in this study will be coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, will be employed to summarize the data. Descriptive statistics provide a comprehensive summary of the data, offering insights into patterns and trends (Barman, 2002). The findings will be presented using tables in chapter four, ensuring a clear and structured presentation of the results. This approach will facilitate an effective interpretation of the data and support the drawing of meaningful conclusions.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

To ensure the ethical integrity of this study, several measures were implemented to protect participants' rights and well-being. A consent form was prepared and tested during the pilot study, clearly outlining the research purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participants' rights. Participants were given ample time to read and understand the information, and consent was obtained voluntarily, with assurance that participation was optional and could be withdrawn at any time without repercussions. Privacy and confidentiality were strictly adhered to, with participants' identities protected by using unique codes or pseudonyms instead of names. All collected data was securely stored and accessible only to the research team. The study also respected cultural differences and was sensitive to gender and other social considerations, ensuring that participants' rights and well-being were prioritized at all stages of the research.

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IV: RESULTS

4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

Table 4.1 Environmental Sustainability Education

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	N
Integrating sustainability education into the curriculum improves students' awareness of environmental issues.	10	16	14	12	6	58
	17%	28%	24%	21%	10%	100
Teacher training on sustainability topics is essential for effective curriculum integration.	16	15	5	14	8	58
	28%	26%	9%	24%	14%	100
Lack of resources and teaching materials hinders the integration of sustainability education.	20	7	13	15	3	58
	34%	12%	22%	26%	5%	100
Policy support is crucial for the successful integration of sustainability education into national curricula.	16	19	15	5	3	58
	28%	33%	26%	9%	5%	100
Engaging stakeholders, including communities and industries, enhances the effectiveness of sustainability education.	19	16	5	12	6	58
	33%	28%	9%	21%	10%	100

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Table 4.1 summarized findings from a survey on environmental sustainability education, based on responses from 58 participants. It explored perspectives on integrating sustainability education into curricula, teacher training, resource challenges, policy support, and stakeholder engagement. Regarding the integration of sustainability education, participants expressed varying levels of agreement: 10 (17%) strongly agreed and 16 (28%) agreed that it improved students' awareness of environmental issues. In contrast, 12 (21%) disagreed and 6 (10%) strongly disagreed, indicating differing opinions on its effectiveness. Teacher training on sustainability topics was seen as crucial, with 16 (28%) strongly agreeing and 15 (26%) agreeing. Conversely, 14 (24%) disagreed, suggesting skepticism about the necessity of such training.Resource constraints were identified as a significant barrier, with 20 (34%) strongly agreeing and 7 (12%) agreeing that lack of resources hindered integration. This underscored the perceived need for adequate materials to support sustainability education. Policy support was considered essential, with 16 (28%) strongly agreeing and 19 (33%) agreeing. However, 5 (9%) disagreed, indicating some uncertainty about policy's impact on integration. Engaging stakeholders received positive feedback, with 19 (33%) strongly agreeing and 16 (28%) agreeing. On the other hand, 12 (21%) disagreed, reflecting mixed opinions on the benefits of stakeholder involvement in sustainability education.

This study is in line with a study by Adams and Smith (2020) who conducted a qualitative study examining the integration of environmental education into the South African school curriculum. The research focused on analyzing policy frameworks, exploring implementation challenges, and assessing the impact on student learning outcomes. The study highlighted the critical need for aligning the curriculum with sustainability goals to effectively enhance environmental awareness among students. It underscored the role of comprehensive teacher training programs in promoting sustainable practices and fostering environmental stewardship among South African youth.

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V: SUMMARY

5.1 Environmental Sustainability Education's Influence on National Curricula

The study's first goal was to examine how effective integration of environmental sustainability education impacted national curricula. Based on the descriptive statistics results, regarding the integration of sustainability education, participants expressed varying levels of agreement: 10 (17%) strongly agreed and 16 (28%) agreed that it improved students' awareness of environmental issues. In contrast, 12 (21%) disagreed and 6 (10%) strongly disagreed, indicating differing opinions on its effectiveness. Teacher training on sustainability topics was seen as crucial, with 16 (28%) strongly agreeing and 15 (26%) agreeing. Conversely, 14 (24%) disagreed, suggesting skepticism about the necessity of such training. Resource constraints were identified as a significant barrier, with 20 (34%) strongly agreeing and 7 (12%) agreeing that lack of resources hindered integration. This underscored the perceived need for adequate materials to support sustainability education. Policy support was considered essential, with 16 (28%) strongly agreeing and 19 (33%) agreeing. However, 5 (9%) disagreed, indicating some uncertainty about policy's impact on integration. Engaging stakeholders received positive feedback, with 19 (33%) strongly agreeing and 16 (28%) agreeing. On the other hand, 12 (21%) disagreed, reflecting mixed opinions on the benefits of stakeholder involvement in sustainability education.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concluded that, it highlighted the importance of aligning educational policies with sustainability goals to foster environmentally conscious citizenship among students .Key considerations included the need for robust teacher training programs tailored to sustainability topics, adequate allocation of resources and teaching materials, supportive policy frameworks that promoted sustainability education, and effective stakeholder engagement strategies. Addressing these challenges required collaborative efforts across educational institutions, government agencies, and community stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of environmental education initiatives. By integrating sustainability principles into national curricula effectively, societies could better prepare future generations to address environmental challenges and contribute to sustainable development.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the study made a number of recommendations, including:

Conduct a comprehensive review of existing curricula to ensure alignment with sustainability goals and enhance the relevance of environmental education across all educational levels. Develop robust and mandatory training programs for educators on sustainability topics to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective curriculum integration. Allocate sufficient resources and funding towards the development and procurement of teaching materials and resources specifically designed for sustainability education. Advocate for the formulation and implementation of supportive policies at national and institutional levels that promote sustainability education and provide clear guidelines for implementation.

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