



Student Leaders' Perception and Practice of Environmental Leadership Toward Sustainable Development

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Environmental problems are increasingly pressing the planet more severely than ever. The United Nations has called on member states to actively address socio-economic problems by considering the crucial role of maintaining environmental health in the pursuit of sustainable development. The youth are a catalyst for achieving sustainable development due to their willpower, dynamism, and creativity. Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide avenues for training these young people as leaders who could help societies transition to a sustainability-inspired future. This study used a descriptive-evaluative method and a generic qualitative approach to determine student leaders' perceptions and practices of environmental leadership toward sustainable development. The research involved content analysis of pertinent documents from student organizations and semi-structured interviews with ten purposively-sampled student leaders from the College of Education of a State University in Central Luzon, Philippines. The study found that student leaders manifest a foundational understanding of the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development. They also manifest a working understanding of environmental leadership, though it is not widely practiced, as evidenced by their need for planned activities fostering care for the environment. The student leaders identified the need for more support and cited fiscal, academic, and other process-related constraints as significant challenges hampering their practice of environmental leadership towards sustainability, especially in the school community setting.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, nature has provided humanity with essential resources, from basic necessities to advanced electronics. Human existence relies on the environment's constant provision of material needs. Despite benefiting from the environment, humans have neglected the necessary balance with it. This equilibrium is crucial for sustainable progress, yet the current global situation shows a significant disconnect. According to the 2024 Global Risks Report of the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2024), environmental threats remain on top of the world's most pressing concerns regarding likelihood and impact.

In 2015, the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, featuring 17 SDGs

aimed at global peace and prosperity. These goals recognize the interdependence of sustainability's components, emphasizing that issues like poverty and climate change must be addressed together for lasting solutions.

The UN views young people as crucial drivers of sustainable development, utilizing social media, debates, and technology to address environmental concerns and implement SDGs. Therefore, they must be considered equal partners in achieving these goals (UN DESA, 2018). In the Philippines, youth organizations actively participate in projects targeting pollution and climate change (Hermoso, 2019; NYC, n.d.). This participation is deemed crucial given the country's low ranking (168th out of 180) in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (Block et al., 2024).

According to Segovia and Galang (2002), higher education institutions (HEIs) are effective venues for reviewing existing approaches and offering alternatives for sustainable development (SD) due to their human resources, knowledge base, and experience. They also hold social acceptability, technical credibility, and moral ascendancy to critique government and business actions toward SD. Similarly, Stough et al. (2013) emphasize that HEIs create and transfer knowledge to society, preparing students for significant societal roles. Understanding their role in SD, students can become leaders for sustainability within their institutions and continue as agents of change in their professional lives. Zooming in on the environmental dimension of sustainability, studies report high environmental awareness but moderate participation among student leaders, attributed to factors like funding and time constraints (Nayle et al., 2024; Palencia, 2019). Such gaps between awareness and action have been attributed to a number of factors particularly concerning lack of sustainability, lack of funding and time constraints (Palencia, 2019).

Young people bring fresh ideas and can drive societal changes. College students, with their academic knowledge, are well-positioned to solve environmental problems (Ramirez, 2017). In fact, the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandates HEIs to provide opportunities for environmental involvement, aligning with Republic Act 9512. This is in line with the idea that student leadership builds environmental stewardship, bridging academic knowledge with community advocacy (Ramirez, 2017).

It is widely accepted that environmental issues are complex by their very nature. Akiyama et al. (2013) view Asian educational systems as lacking in holistic presentation of environmental issues. They further argue that this kind of educational system needs to foster interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches (using the three dimensions of SD as a framework) in teaching environmental issues, emphasizing hands-on experiences. Since environmental problems in the 21st century require the collective input of diverse experts and institutions, the same authors assert that environmental leadership is necessary to effect the necessary changes. These environmental leaders are expected to advance environmental sustainability through the efficient integration of their desire to protect the environment into their decision-making processes and actions (Akiyama et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Segovia and Galang (2002) believe that students must be able to view realities and appreciate their multi-faceted nature. In doing so, they could respond, as global citizens, to the issues that threaten the planet. Moreover, Stough et al. (2013) state that giving students minimal roles, not valuing the knowledge they possess, and failing to provide them with opportunities to take responsibility to limit their engagement in the practice of SD in HEIs. Hence, if failures do happen, they must be valued as essential sources of lessons (Wright, 2002) for improvement and not as parameters with which students' capabilities are judged.

Authors in leadership studies claim that there is no perfect leadership theory ideally suited to explain the mechanics of environmental leadership. However, Akiyama et al. (2013) present an interesting and coherent framework through which elements (i.e., strong motivation, expertise, and leadership) constitute what an environmental leader should possess. Since it is widely supported that the youth, especially those in HEIs, are essential drivers of SD and are thus potential environmental leaders, this paper examined how students in the HEI setting, with emphasis on those with actual leadership experience, understand sustainability principles and environmental leadership. In addition, it looked into how they channel their leadership towards protecting the

environment. Furthermore, it explored their perceived barriers towards their practice of environmental leadership. It is hoped that the findings contribute to the relatively limited academic discourse on environmental leadership, especially in the context of student leaders. The study hopes to provide a baseline to serve as a springboard towards further enrichment of the leadership culture of student organizations in HEIs and challenge administrators, faculty, and student leaders to take a more active stance in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do student leaders perceive sustainability and sustainable development?
2. How do student leaders conceptualize environmental leadership?
3. How do student leaders practice environmental leadership?
4. What challenges are faced by student leaders in their practice of environmental leadership towards sustainable development?

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the College of Education of one of host institution's regular campuses, during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the records of the campus's Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) for the school year 2019-2020, there were eight accredited student organizations, all of which were active in spearheading activities geared towards student development. The study involved these eight accredited student organizations and ten purposively sampled student leaders, including the campus student council (CSG) president, college student government (CoSG) governors, and the presidents of the accredited student organizations.

The research employed a descriptive-evaluative method and a generic qualitative approach, utilizing both document analysis and semi-structured interviews to determine student leaders' perceptions and practices of environmental leadership toward sustainable development. Official documents regularly submitted by the subject organizations to the campus Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS) were analyzed as part of the study requirements. For purposes of triangulation, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather more information and validate the content of the documents.

Given the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted one-by-one using an online platform. Transcripts of these interviews were prepared and subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide. The six phases include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

A formal letter was submitted to the concerned campus officials to request access to the necessary documents for data collection. Informed consent was secured from all informants before proceeding with the interviews. To maintain ethical standards, the names of the student leaders were not disclosed in any part of this paper. The thematic analysis provided a detailed understanding of the student leaders' knowledge, practices, and the challenges they face in exercising environmental leadership toward sustainability within the school community setting.

Conceptual Framework

The study is mainly rooted in Akiyama et al.'s (2013) model of environmental leadership, which emphasizes three core elements: strong motivation, expertise, and leadership. Akiyama et al. argue that an effective environmental leader must first possess a clear understanding of the urgency of sustainability issues and a willingness to act on these challenges by integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Expertise in environmental issues



Fig. 1. The Paradigm of the Study

is crucial, enabling leaders to create informed solutions and transfer knowledge effectively. Strong leadership skills are also essential, including the ability to understand the multifaceted nature of sustainability, develop innovative perspectives on environmental protection, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and make consensus-based decisions. In the context of student leadership, this study adds two additional layers: a deep understanding of sustainable development and strong support from the academic community. The academic community's role is vital in nurturing these qualities by providing resources, mentorship, and opportunities for practical engagement. This targeted approach ensures that students are well-prepared to become future environmental leaders capable of driving meaningful change to the community.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented thematically, surfacing key insights related to student leaders' perceptions of sustainability, conceptualizations of environmental leadership, practical leadership actions, and the challenges they face. A separate section follows, offering an integrated discussion of these findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the results and their implications.

1. Student leaders' perceptions of sustainability and sustainable development

Content analysis of the existing Constitution and By-Laws (CBL) was accomplished, focusing on the part/s which define/s the nature of the organization (e.g., vision statement, mission statement, statement of purpose). Such undertaking provided the researcher with a clear context of where the organization's programs and projects are rooted. While statements suggestive of the organization's possible integration of sustainable development are evident (e.g., develop social awareness and responsibility, advocate social consciousness, etc.) in the CBL submitted by some of the organizations, semi-structured interviews to determine the student leaders' perception of sustainability and sustainable development was deemed necessary to validate the information reflected in the documents. Analysis of the documents vis-à-vis the responses obtained from the interview yielded the themes discussed below.

Sustainability creates lasting impacts. More than half of the student leaders interviewed associated the term sustainability with the word "consistency." In light of leadership, they believe that a leader who champions sustainability uses his influence and resources effectively to attain his organization's noble goals. One participant said,

“There may only be sustainability in a program when a leader considers if the resources available to him will allow for an undertaking to be accomplished on a maintainable basis.” [Participant 2]

Hence, a leader with an eye for sustainability can view an issue holistically, have good foresight, and weigh options objectively when faced with uncertainties, especially in challenging decision-making scenarios. Most interviewees agree that when a leader possesses these basic skills, the consistency of the leader’s actions or programs is almost assured. These endeavors will create lasting impacts within the organization being led and the community of which he/she is a part.

Sustainable development is transformative. The individual purpose statements of the various student organizations subject to this study reflect each organization’s unique identity. Likewise, a deeper look into these statements provides a vivid picture of how each organization channels this uniqueness to highlight its important role in effecting desirable societal changes. Each organization’s direction in terms of promoting sustainable development is evident in purpose statements, which revolve around the goals of “*advocating social consciousness*,” “*providing for students’ holistic development*,” and “*empowering students to become excellent leaders*,” among others. To bring these goals to fruition, most of the organizations think that any student could be a leader given the will to be one. Therefore, sustainable development is inclusive and provides a fertile ground where seeds of leadership may grow. As one of the interviewees puts it,

As an organization president, what I aim for is to produce leaders who will make a stand, not only within the confines of the campus but also when they step out of their school’s portals to offer themselves in the service of a greater society. [Participant 1]

Sustainable development is considering everybody’s good. Half of the participating student leaders in this study were able to correctly and effectively link the concept of sustainability with sustainable natural resource management. One participant mentioned:

Sustainable development has something to do with balance – what you do with or take from nature should not harm nature. Therefore, even if we take resources from nature because we have to meet our needs, we must be able to maintain it at its healthy state. [Participant 1]

Furthermore, another student leader stated that:

Sustainable development entails meeting one’s needs but entails a deep concern for the source of his needs – the environment. If the goal is to sustain the needs of humans, then the availability of valuable resources from the natural environment has to be secured as well for the sake of the future generations. [Participant 8]

These same participants posit that the practice of sustainable development should likewise emphasize promoting awareness and developing responsibility for how people extract and utilize resources from the natural environment.

2. Student leaders’ concept of environmental leadership

From the semi-structured interviews, it was known that there had yet to be explicit inclusion of environmental leadership in the previous leadership training, summits, and fora attended by the current batch of student leaders.

Hence, for most of the participants, the time of data gathering for this study was the first time they heard of the term environmental leadership. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the same participants provided interesting insights as to what environmental leadership means to them and who an environmental leader is.

From traditional leadership to environmental leadership. Most participants believe that putting together the characteristics of being a role model, strong influence, and a sense of authority gives rise to a leader. Furthermore, when leadership applies these characteristics in environmental programs, that leader may be regarded as an environmental leader. It may, therefore, be construed that based on the responses obtained, student leaders simply view environmental leadership as the practice of leadership in a specific context, i.e., environment.

“A leader is expected to possess the typical leadership traits that we know about. This includes discipline. But aside from this, a leader must possess an awareness of what is happening around – like social or environmental happenings. It is actually not just being aware but being able to take action too.” [Participant 8]

Addressing issues through knowledge of the environment. Most participant student leaders identify an environmental leader as one with a “*strong initiative to plan and carry out an environmental program or project.*” This, according to them, will only be realized if the leader possesses a solid theoretical foundation about the environment and is updated on current environmental issues. An environmental leader is expected to have the necessary knowledge set on how the environment works and skillfully apply such knowledge to address environmental issues. To put this in context, one student leader stated:

Our organization can release informative materials centered on taking care of the environment. This will contribute to sustainable development as we transcend from simply reporting what we know about the environment to influencing people across ages to preserve the wonders of nature. [Participant 7]

Genuine concern for the environment fuels environmental leadership. Participants generally agree that environmental leaders need to be more knowledgeable and aware of environmental changes. They are also genuinely concerned about these changes, fueling their motive to initiate an action or a set of actions to address environmental issues. According to one participant,

I think it is vital for an environmental leader to possess significant knowledge and a high level of awareness about environmental issues. However, such knowledge and awareness do not altogether define the totality of the environmental leader as he should also be one who actively takes part in acting on these issues. [Participant 7]

The student leaders likewise think that an environmental leader's concern and motivation towards protecting the environment brings forth a challenge to model the changes the leader wants to effect and represent the constituents in discussions about the integrity of the natural environment. Another manifestation of an environmental leader's deep concern towards the environment is willingness and natural drive to critically evaluate the outcomes of environmental programs so that best practices may be retained and points for improvement may be identified and addressed in the future.

3. Practice of environmental leadership among participant student leaders

To deal with this objective, content analysis of the annual action plans of the participating organizations was undertaken to identify initiatives (programs or projects) aligned with addressing any environmental issue. It was found that among the eight organizations, only two (2), i.e., the *Campus Student Council* (1 project) and the *Earth Savers Club* (4 projects), have included at least one environmentally-themed project or program in their respective annual plans. Hence, a need to explore the possible cause was warranted, and this was addressed through a qualitative inquiry as to whether and how the student leaders see their respective organizations as instruments to foster environmental protection and conservation. The succeeding themes were generated from the data obtained from the interviews.

Not the right organization. Six of the ten student leaders representing the eight organizations have expressed that their organization needs to be the proper authority to initiate environmentally-themed programs and projects. They further assert that a specific organization is expected to spearhead such projects and may only act to support them as needed. This implies that the student leaders in the study locale do not perceive addressing environmental issues in support of sustainable development to be among the primary concerns of their group as it is a function vested in a specific organization only. This is evident in the following responses:

To be honest, we do not devote a specific program or project towards addressing any environmental issue because our organization is focused on how we could develop camaraderie and promote appreciation of diversity among students. [Participant 1]

We have a forthcoming event which is environmentally-themed but we cannot focus all our projects on environmental issues. Only a specific club is focused on such projects. [Participant 4]

We do not have any of these (environmental) projects because we only focus on what our organization may realistically accomplish and share. [Participant 4]

We are not the proper organization to deal with this kind of projects but it doesn't mean that we are not concerned about the environment. We may provide our support to the organization which initiates such projects. [Participant 5]

Since my organization is aligned with another subject area, I think I cannot initiate such projects (environmental) though I can provide support to them. I think another club is focused on such projects. As the name of their organization suggests, they are responsible and are more capable of carrying out such projects. [Participant 9]

While it is true that environment-leaning organizations usually have the mandate or interest to initiate projects toward environmental protection and conservation, this does not constitute a barrier that limits an organization's willingness to propose or lead a project that uses environmental issues as a context to perform its mandates. In one of the narrative reports submitted by one of the organizations, there was a specific part of a campus program where some students performed a skit aimed towards commemorating the devastation caused by typhoon Yolanda, notably one of the most devastating typhoons that ever hit the country, therefore constituting a tacit reminder to protect the environment and prepare for disasters. Hence, regardless of the nature of the organization, it may showcase its uniqueness and perform its mandates while advocating environmental conservation toward sustainable development.

Raising awareness is the key. While most of the student leaders interviewed adhere to the concept that initiating environmentally-inclined projects is mandate-specific, it is interesting to note that some of these leaders realize that they can contribute to raising awareness of environmental issues. Some noteworthy responses from two leaders are provided below.

Our organization can release informative materials centered on taking care of the environment. This will contribute to sustainable development as we transcend from simply reporting what we know about the environment to influencing people across ages to preserve the wonders of nature. [Participant 7]

As a president, I can propose a seminar to raise the awareness of my fellow students on how we could do our share to protect the environment from being damaged further. This can be supplemented with a leadership training summit or a team building activity to empower leaders to apply the theories they have learned into actual practice. [Participant 1]

Transfer of advocacy to the community. Some of the student leaders interviewed manifested their plan to integrate environmental conservation programs through community service and extension programs. As stated by some of the interviewees,

Though not explicitly stated in our action plan, we take an active part in the extension programs connected with environmental issues. Just last year, our organization participated in a clean and green project in a partner public elementary school. We also participate in programs of our (campus') barangay which focus on environmental conservation and sustainable development. [Participant 5]

Actually, with the guidance of our club adviser, we are working out to initiate at least one community service because we currently do not have any environmental project in our action plan. This will probably be in the form of an environmental awareness seminar. [Participant 3].

4. Challenges faced by student leaders in their practice of environmental leadership toward sustainable development

Interviews with the respondents revealed constraints they perceive to constitute barriers in their practice of environmental leadership toward sustainable development. Three themes were generated from the analysis of the data collected.

Lack of support. At least four of the participants raised the problem of the lack of support by stakeholders within the campus.

Faculty members who are not supportive of student organizations constitute an added problem. They are the reasons why sometimes, even if a leader has the heart to serve, he or she tends to lose the drive simply because of the feeling that nobody supports his or her cause. [Participant 1]

In this campus, support from students and the administration are lacking. This is a reason why student leaders find it difficult to initiate projects which target everyone's involvement. [Participant 7]

Maybe it's because of the kind of support system from the higher-ups. Even if an organization wills to initiate an action, if there is not enough support, it's going to be difficult. [Participant 8]

In case of the school administration, I think they can help by actively participating in the programs and offering financial assistance when needed. [Participant 9]

The same participants opine that if support is given, they would be more motivated to work towards fulfilling their share of the university's vision and mission by fulfilling the mandates of their respective organizations.

Fiscal, academic, and other system-related constraints. Student leaders expressed that they also face tough challenges when it comes to budgeting their time as heads of their respective organizations and as students who also need to attend their classes and comply with academic requirements. The following responses provide context to this theme:

To be honest, it is truly difficult to manage time. We often lose time to initiate projects. In fact, at times, we are not really able to accomplish all of the proposed projects in our action plan due to time constraints. [Participant 1]

As students also, we need ample time. Our problem with time is just compounded by professors who are not supportive of the organizations' causes. [Participant 1]

Budget and the tedious documentary requirements are among the problems perceived by the student leaders as hampering their exercise of environmental leadership. As stated by one participant,

Another added burden is the release of the budget. There are lots of documents that need to be accomplished first. This is why at times, I lose the drive to propose activities. In addition, it also makes the process more difficult when we are asked to constantly revise our proposals before they get approved. Sometimes, it's what the higher-ups prefer that happens and student leaders tend to lose their say in things. [Participant 1]

Accepting emerging challenges. For almost half of the student leaders interviewed, the call to actively engage in environmental projects is already a challenge. As emphasized above, many of these organizations find it challenging to reconcile their identity as an organization with the call to promote environmental awareness and conservation, among other things. It is noteworthy that during the interviews, these student leaders somehow devised a "compromise" to at least provide support if needed in a particular environmental activity spearheaded by any of the organizations. So, a number of these organizations expressed their willingness to collaborate if called upon to do so. The following responses attest to this claim,

Since our organization needs to prioritize the welfare of the students, what I do is support every organization. If they have projects, they can ask our organization for budgetary aid. [Participant 1]

We are not the proper organization to deal with this kind of project but it doesn't mean that we are not concerned about the environment. We may provide our support to the organization which initiates such projects. [Participant 5]

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a multidimensional view of sustainability and environmental through the lens of student leaders, focusing on both perceptions and practices. The perceptions of sustainability among student leaders go hand-in-hand with the notion that effective leadership in sustainability requires consistency, foresight, and the ability to view issues holistically. These characteristics enable leaders to ensure that their actions create lasting impacts, clearly reflecting an understanding of sustainability as a continual, transformative process that extends beyond immediate outcomes (Akiyama et al., 2013). This perspective puts emphasis on the importance of integrating sustainable practices into leadership roles, where consistency and a long-term vision are crucial for achieving enduring success and community benefits (Stough et al., 2013).

The concept of environmental leadership, as perceived by the student leaders, shows a shift from traditional leadership attributes to those tailored for addressing environmental issues. The findings suggest that while environmental leadership may not have been explicitly included in previous training, the student leaders recognize the need for strong initiative, a solid theoretical foundation, and genuine concern for environmental issues. This shift indicates an evolving understanding that effective environmental leadership involves not only knowledge and awareness but also proactive action and collaboration (Segovia & Galang, 2002). Such insights further reflect a broader recognition that environmental challenges require leaders who can apply their expertise and passion to make a tangible impact (Nayle et al., 2024).

In terms of practice, however, the study reveals that only a few student organizations have incorporated environmentally-themed projects into their annual plans. Many leaders perceive environmental initiatives as outside their organization's primary focus, surfacing a need for more targeted efforts and awareness in this area. Nonetheless, there is a notable willingness among student leaders to support and raise awareness about environmental issues, even if their organizations are not primarily focused on these concerns. This may be construed as a potential for broader engagement in environmental projects and highlights the importance of building a strong culture of environmental advocacy across various types of student organizations, through collaborations.

The challenges faced by student leaders in practicing environmental leadership have also been observed to align with those reported by Palencia (2019), including a lack of support, fiscal constraints, and time management issues. These obstacles can impede their ability to initiate and sustain environmental projects effectively. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from stakeholders within the campus to provide adequate support and resources, thereby empowering student leaders to overcome barriers and enhance their contributions to sustainable development.

Given that the participants in this study are future educators, their experiences and insights hold particular significance for the field of education. As they transition into their roles as educators, these student leaders have the potential to champion environmental projects within their future schools. As they apply their understanding of sustainability and environmental leadership, they can influence and inspire their students and colleagues to engage in and promote sustainable practices (Delos Reyes, n.d.; NYC, n.d.). This integration of environmental advocacy into educational settings can shape a generation of environmentally conscious individuals who are well-equipped to contribute to sustainable development in their communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, student leaders in this study possess a foundational understanding of the basic concepts of sustainability and sustainable development, as evidenced by their definitions and illustrations. However, none of the data gathered mentioned the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or how institutions anchor their purpose and course of action on these SDGs. The researcher concludes that while these student leaders have a theoretical background in leadership and the characteristics of a good leader, their view of environmental

leadership is somewhat myopic, seeing it mainly as leadership within the environmental context. Using Akiyama et al.'s (2013) framework as a lens, the element of leadership is visible among the participants. However, they need further motivation and support, along with learning opportunities, to enhance their skills. Although these leaders have a theoretical understanding of environmental issues, this knowledge can be further enhanced through more experiential (i.e., hands-on) approaches, allowing them to apply what they know in real-world contexts.

To improve the effectiveness of leadership training programs, it is recommended that the line-up of topics and workshops be aligned with the SDGs or AmBisyon 2040 to contextualize learning effectively. Additionally, a special session on environmental leadership should be included in the training agenda. It is also recommended that the campus adopt a uniform template and format for writing action plans and narratives. Further training should be provided to student leaders on anchoring their projects and activities with the SDGs, the university's vision, mission, and objectives (VMO), and the organization's purpose and VMO.

With the necessary support and encouragement, the campus has a promising set of leaders who will likely evolve into professionals contributing significantly to nation-building through sustainable development.

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지속 가능한 개발을 위한 학생 리더들의 환경 리더십에 대한 인식과 실천

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본 연구는 서술적 평가 방법과 일반적인 질적 접근법을 사용하여 지속 가능한 발전을 위한 학생 리더들의 환경 리더십에 대한 인식과 실천을 살펴보는 것이다. 이를 위하여 학생 단체의 관련된 문서에 대한 내용 분석과 필리핀 중부 루손에 있는 주립대학교 교육대학에서 임의적으로 표본 추출한 10명의 학생 리더와의 반구조화된 설문지를 통해 분석하였다. 분석 결과, 학생 리더들은 지속가능성과 지속 가능한 개발의 개념에 대한 기본적인 이해를 가지고 있으며, 환경 보호를 위한 계획된 활동에 대한 필요성을 인식하고 있는 것으로 나타났다. 다만, 환경 리더십에 대한 실무적 이해가 있지만 널리 실천하지 못하는 것으로 나타났다. 이에 대해 학생 리더들은 환경 리더십에 필요한 재정적, 학업적, 기타 과정 관련 제약을 극복하기 위한 자원 동원의 필요성을 제안하였다.

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