

Mainstreaming the SDGs in Higher Education: A Curriculum Analysis of Ankara's Universities in Türkiye

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Abstract

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future by addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and quality education. Higher education institutions play a critical role in this mission by embedding sustainability principles into their academic programs and institutional strategies.

This study examines the engagement of 21 universities in Ankara, Turkey, with the SDGs through an analysis of their undergraduate course catalogs. The research focuses on identifying to what extent topics related to the SDGs—such as climate action, clean energy, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, and gender equality—are integrated into the curriculum. It further evaluates whether these institutions provide formal education, training, and interdisciplinary approaches aligned with sustainability goals.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines content analysis of publicly available course descriptions and syllabi with a qualitative assessment of thematic integration. The study explores various academic disciplines, including environmental sciences, economics, engineering, social sciences, and health sciences, to evaluate how comprehensively SDG-related themes are addressed. Preliminary findings indicate that while certain universities offer courses explicitly connected to sustainability and specific SDGs, a systematic and institutionalized approach is often lacking. Barriers such as fragmented curricula, limited institutional commitment, and lack of interdisciplinary coordination hinder the full implementation of SDG-oriented education.

This study underscores the need for Turkish universities to adopt a more integrated and strategic approach to sustainability education by embedding the SDGs across disciplines and academic levels. It also highlights the importance of collaboration between universities, policymakers, and civil society in fostering a culture of sustainability. The findings aim to support stakeholders in higher education who seek to align academic programs with global sustainability frameworks and contribute meaningfully to the 2030 Agenda.

Keywords

Sustainable Development Goals, higher education, curriculum analysis, University social responsibility, interdisciplinary learning, sustainability education, climate action, education policy.