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SDG use in Japanese University EFL: Internationalization and Classroom Practice

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education of Japan has incorporated principles of the United Nations' Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into its educational targets since 2016, influencing university English language classes and the teaching of "global issue" topics such as the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) (Edwards & Ashida, 2021; Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024). However, the adaptive demands of this directive can leave EFL educators wondering if they have done enough, or questioning how (or if) their teaching facilitates ESD, and the suitability of their specific classroom practices. This paper presents a reflective action research in university academic contexts; conducted between 2017 and 2024, and concerning two specific classroom practices involving the teaching of SDGs. Relevant background of Japanese educational standards and university internationalization is considered. Conclusions indicate that, in the academic settings studied, the SDGs were a positive, useful tool in the accomplishment of language-related goals, but only about half of MEXT's ESD targets were consistently achieved due to various common limitations. Implications for improvements to classroom practice in line with global education are discussed.

要旨

日本の文部科学省は 2016 年以降、国連の「持続可能な開発のための教育（ESD）」の原則を教育目標に取り入れ、多くの日本の大学で起きている国際化の長い軌跡に影響を与えている（Brown, 2017; Kobayashi, 2021）。この国際化は、大学の英語授業にも及び、SDGs（持続可能な開発目標）のような「グローバル・イシュー」を話題に取り上げることも多い（Edwards & Ashida, 2021; Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024）。しかし、このような広範な国際化プロセスに参加することで、EFL 教育者は、自分たちは十分なことができたのだろうかと疑問を抱き、自分たちの教育が ESD をどのように促進するのか（あるいは促進しているのか）、また、自分たちの具体的な授業実践が適切なのかどうか、疑問を抱くことになる。大学の教育背景における本省察アクションリサーチは、2017 年から 2024 年にかけて、著者自身の勤務先において、SDGs に関わる 2 つの具体的な授業実践について行われた。日本の教育水準と大学の国際化に関連する背景を考察する。結論として、調査された教育環境において、SDGs は言語関連の目標を達成する上で前向きで有用なツールであったが、様々な共通の制約により、文部科学省の ESD 目標の約半分しか一貫して達成されなかったことが示された。グローバル教育に沿った授業実践の改善への示唆が議論される。

Should the educational goals of an English language class include producing engaged, global citizens? Perhaps surprisingly, according to the Ministry of Education's explicit statement of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles in 2016, the answer is yes (MEXT, 2016). Japan has been a forerunner and partner with the United Nations in the international approach to education for a sustainable future, requiring elementary through high school curriculum to adopt ESD perspectives in a systemic, top-down program. Some of the goals laid out (Figure 1) include imparting a global worldview, with "fairness, cooperation, [and] responsibility" (MEXT, 2015). While these national curriculum standards stop at the high school level, the university setting in Japan has several further reasons to desire internationalization, which in theory includes producing engaged, global citizens (UNESCO, 2014; Rose & McKinley, 2018).

Figure 1.

MEXT "Aims of the ESD"

(1) Teachers and students elicit issues related to building a sustainable society, centering on the "six perspectives" that constitute the building a sustainable society. **Concepts of sustainable society-building**	(2) Teachers and students acquire the "seven competencies and attitudes" necessary to solve problems in order to build a sustainable society **Competencies and attitudes to be emphasized in ESD**
1 Diversity (variety exists) 2 Interdependence (relating to each other) 3 Limitation (limits exist) 4 Fairness (valuing everybody) 5 Cooperation (cooperating with others) 6 Responsibility (taking responsibility)	1. Ability to think critically 2. Ability to plan with anticipation of a future scenario 3. Ability to think in multidimensional and integrative ways 4. Ability to communicate 5. Ability to cooperate with others 6. Attitude to respect relations and connections 7. Attitude to participate proactively

(MEXT, 2015)

However, these descriptors of students may not align with the actual experiences of EFL educators; in fact, in this author's estimation, true accomplishment of these targets would be a rare feat. I have worked for years in various Japanese university contexts, specifically in the instruction and design of content-language integrated (CLIL) English with global issues as a focus. In coordinating such curricula for nearly a decade, I have experimented with pedagogies, outcomes, and materials in the classroom. This paper discusses classroom settings that are in two completely separate, private universities in different areas of Japan,

where I have taught and designed courses in EFL roughly between the years of 2017 to 2024. Both universities' English programs feature SDG-focused classroom practices. In other words, this paper is being written on the basis of having had first-hand experience in contending with these issues, and my positionality as an author is contextualized by my own experience in assessing to what extent my featuring of SDGs in my classroom constitutes teaching students to "think in multidimensional and integrative ways" (MEXT, 2015)?

In this sense, through the medium of reflective action research, this paper attempts to answer some of the questions that arise in a university EFL classroom awash in SDGs and, sometimes, pressured to appeal to an internationally focused administration. Specifically, why do intermediate-high level university EFL classes so commonly use the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Also, does the practice of teaching the SDGs in a university EFL class meet the goals MEXT has laid out, specifically imparting responsibility and connectedness? To properly investigate these questions, I posit that the context of the classroom, the university itself, and the adaptive demands towards internationalization that MEXT imposes on them, must first be considered.

Internationalization in Japanese Higher Education

"Internationalization" can be summed up as the process of making something more international, but in educational practice this is far from simple. In a review of internationalization in higher education, Rose and McKinley (2018) state that internationalization has been seen both negatively and positively. A negative perspective might point out the financial benefits to universities in attracting foreign students for their tuition, then enjoying their presence on campus without truly offering multi-lingual or multi-cultural perspectives in their curriculum. On the other hand, the positive side of internationalization showcases the universities' improvements in diversity, academic reputation, teaching quality, and graduate employability (Rose & McKinley, 2018). Kobayashi (2021) points out that Japanese internationalization efforts since the 1970's have focused primarily on "welcoming students" from various nations, with the result that internationalization on campus is often equated with student diversity. As the debate about the true nature of internationalization continues, how do these globalizing university environments influence the English language classrooms on their campuses?

Educational Frameworks

The ESD goals put forward by MEXT in 2016 were in many ways sensibly grounded in

various pedagogical theories. From 2005-2014, the United Nations promoted a "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development," with targets such as "critical and systemic thinking, collaborative decision-making, and taking responsibility" (UNESCO, 2014). In 2016, after ESD was officially adopted as part of the national curriculum standards, the Japanese government's guidelines required that students "acquire [...] [the] ability to communicate [...] [and] cooperate with others" (MEXT, 2016). These educational goals, especially for young learners, are valued by various pedagogical frameworks such as Outcome-Based Education, Constructivism, Multiple Intelligence Theory, and not least of all, Global Education. The latter is a language-teaching ideology that aims to combat apathy, foster intercultural connections, and "to enable students with the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens to solve global problems" (Cates, 2002). Teachers like myself who encounter indifferent, sheltered students use global issues content, such as the SDGs, to increase motivation for learning; I have found that genuine interest in solving problems for which we share responsibility can lead to increased engagement. Global issues language education specialist Cates (2002) explained the desired outcomes of Global Education as 1) awareness/knowledge of international issues and cultures, 2) skills with which to engage and communicate internationally, 3) an attitude of cooperation and shared responsibility, and 4) participation/action toward global goals in a community. These pillars have a very familiar ring to them when compared with MEXT's stated educational goals.

How University Context Influences the Classroom

Around the same time as the new ESD standards, the Ministry of Education announced the Top Global University Project (TGUP) , a ranking system through which universities' global initiatives could be compared around the world, with the explicit goal of "enhanc[ing] the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in Japan" (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science; Rose & McKinley 2018). Increasingly, SDGs are mentioned in annual TGUP reports (Enkhtur & Rakhshandehroo, 2024), as part of joint programs between university departments, new institutes or centers, or a theme for international events. This can be seen as a direct link between university rankings and internationalization campaigns. Rakhshandehroo (2023) points out that promoting globally-minded Japanese university students has been one of the main objectives of recent internationalization initiatives at Japanese universities. Even though this objective has appeared in numerous university policy statements, it has been mostly associated with enhancing the English proficiency skills of students. (p. 313)

While this may not be true of every university, this potential increased pressure can influence English curriculum and content bias. University-wide "action plans for SDGs" sometimes amount to internationalization strategies, which in turn might be summed up as "accept more international students" and "use more English" (Edwards & Ashida, 2021). Then, this obligation for internationalization might fall disproportionately to the language or liberal arts departments. How much English is on display in the halls? How many English presentation contests, model United Nations, or multicultural festivals can be promoted? What "globalized" classes are being offered, and to whom?

This trend continues as Japanese universities are joining other institutions worldwide that feature increasing English-Medium Instruction (EMI), partly in an attempt to appeal to international students in new ways (Brown, 2017). However, despite funding from MEXT and university rankings being twined together with increased offering of EMI courses (Rose & McKinley, 2018), there is a disconnect between the "belief that EMI automatically leads to language proficiency in English for domestic students" and the reality that many Japanese students are not being prepared for EMI instruction (Brown, 2017; Brown, 2014). While EMI is not offered at every university, and internationalization strategies differ by institution, it is clear that the amount of globalization is only going up, as student populations decrease and many Japanese universities struggle to maintain their enrollment. Thus, classroom practice involving SDGs cannot be examined on merits alone; the wider context of the university is essential to understanding the successes/limitations of, and the pressure imposed on SDG use in EFL practice.

Critical-Emancipatory Action Research of my SDG and EFL Teaching Practice

This study is structured in the vein of what Burns (2009) describes as the *critical-emancipatory* wing of action research, "an empowering approach … addressing broader socially constituted educational structures at the local level." Critical theory, when incorporated into action research, aims to question the social and systemic underpinnings of a practice or its history, in this case, SDG teaching and the internationalization of Japanese universities. Hence, the analysis that henceforth follows contains the expo facto reflections of my own SDG teaching practice in the context of the adaptive demands imposed by both the Universities where I taught as well as the overarching internationalization and ESD pressures from MEXT. The key questions that this reflection is aiming to answer are: 1) Why my universities use SDGs so much, and 2) Are the implicit goals of Japan's Ministry of Education are being met? The following summary compares the settings, students, practices and outcomes of both institutions side-by-side to

understand their value, suitability, and institutional restrictions. At the end, a conclusive reflection that gives tentative answers to the abovementioned guiding questions will be presented.

Considering the University Settings

While this critical reflection is based on only two universities -- "A" and "B" -- both can be considered "typical" regarding several of their features, notably teacher content regulation. My depth of experience at both universities was limited to one or two departments, which is again typical; anecdotally, many educators have shared my experience that departments in Japanese universities are largely isolated from each other. A student or teacher in Department X will generally never meet students or teachers in Department Y. In such an atmosphere, the departments of International Studies, Language, English, Liberal Arts, etc. had complete authority over their own English language instruction content and methods. Another consistent similarity was teacher content deregulation, or non-coordinated curricula. Instructors in many departments in University A, and many (but not all) at University B, had leeway to structure and fluctuate content in their classes as best suited them and their students, within English learning guidelines (sometimes just class titles) established by departmental leaders. This teacher-driven approach often meant sporadic, unpredictable appearances of SDGs in the coursework, as one teacher might elect to use, for example, human rights as a project topic, while others might use photography.

In addition to SDGs scattered across the main curriculum, University A put a great deal of effort into promoting awareness of the SDGs among students through posters, donation drives, recycling campaigns, and week-long themed events. The university also offered SDG-focused extracurricular programs to local high schools as part of its recruitment strategy. Because of the existence of programs like these, the university could be described as "SDG-promoting" despite not requiring any classroom instruction concerning them to the majority of its students.

In contrast, University B had a more student-driven approach to festivals and promotions, rarely showcasing anything but student club efforts or department-sponsored individual research showcases. Departments' approaches to requiring the SDGs in any courses varied; however, just as in University A, the SDGs began to feature more and more in mandatory coursework from 2020-24.

Considering the Students

The students in University A and University B were very similar, as private school students

hoping to graduate with a specialized degree and work in a target field, usually highly variable by department. Classes at both universities tiered students into similar skill levels for a 2-year mandatory English program, starting in first year, ending in second. This intense English requirement for non-language majors, such as economics majors, might have been necessary to equip students for the high amount of EMI content being featured in that department. In summary, all students at both universities were required to take these English classes, and most showed willingness to complete the coursework, perhaps in spite of their lack of interest.

Considering the Educational Targets of Specific SDG-focused Classroom Practices

At University A, I used a project-based learning approach and built the instruction of SDGs into a research presentation assignment for intermediate-high level EFL students. The learning targets I designed for were language-oriented; there was no explicit assessment of students' knowledge of SDG-related information, only their ability to read, research, organize ideas, write sentences, utilize vocabulary and deliver a spoken presentation. There were many preparation and practice lessons designed to develop fluency and oration skills. A rubric (Figure 2) was used to assess students on their final presentations.

Figure 2

University A Presentation Assignment Goals / Assessment

Final Presentation Grading:

	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%
Contents	**Always really interesting!** Includes **A) introduction + facts,** B) comparison to another current issue, C) your analysis and opinions on the future of this situation. **Part "A" is 50% at most.** Your vocabulary is appropriate.	Interesting, but 1-2 small problems. Includes A-B-C. Part "A" is 50% at most. Your vocabulary is appropriate.	Includes A-B-C. Interesting, but 3-4 small problems. **Part "A" is 60% at most.** Your vocabulary is appropriate.	Interesting, but **1 part (A, B, or C) was definitely shorter**/less important/very weak. Your vocabulary is appropriate.	Includes A-B-C. However, 1 part was definitely shorter/less important/very weak. **The organization of ideas was confusing.** Your vocabulary choices are hard to understand.	1 part of the presentation is missing ; it seems to be not included. Even if the vocabulary or ideas are good, **the presentation did not fulfill the requirements of research and analysis.**
Presentation Skills	**90%+ eye contact with the audience, and great energy.** You speak clearly, and have a relaxed tone of voice. The speed of the presentation is natural. You never struggle to pronounce words.	80% eye contact. You speak clearly, and have a relaxed tone of voice. The speed of the presentation is natural. You never struggle to pronounce words.	70% eye contact; you looked at the slides a lot! You speak clearly. The speed of the presentation is mostly natural, but you become slow when you pronounce some words.	60%+ eye contact. **You mostly speak clearly,** but your speed is sometimes slow, like reading.	<60% eye contact. **You speak rigidly, like you are reading aloud.** Some words are pronounced strangely.	<40% eye **contact.** You speak rigidly, like you are reading aloud. Many words are pronounced strangely.

At University B, the program-wide curriculum was EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and

the course goals *did* include SDG content assessment. High-intermediate students were required to attend a weekly Lecture in scaffolded, level-appropriate English about the global problems, causes, and potential futures associated with the SDGs. Remembering and integrating this content into their other weekly English courses was essential to achieving learning outcomes; in this way, the combined weekly English courses served as a CLIL course (Content and Language Integrated Learning), with both language targets and content targets. The 3-4 person, 12-minute speaking exam was an assessment (Figure 3) following both lectures about SDG content, and task-based lessons practicing various interactive speaking skills such as turn-taking and fluency.

Figure 3

University B Graded Discussion Goals / Assessment

Graded Discussion Teacher Version Rubric (edited for viewing)

	Excellent		Good		Acceptable	Below Expectation	Failing
	25	**22**	**20**		**18**	**15**	**12**
Interaction (25%)	Maintains and develops the discussion and **negotiates toward a consensus.** Uses a **wide range of interactional strategies** (see below) spontaneously to **initiate and respond** appropriately, without inter-turn pausing.	(mixed)	Maintains and develops the discussion with attempt at consensus. Uses a range of interactional strategies (see below) spontaneously. **Initiates** and responds appropriately, with little inter-turn pausing.		…	…	Contributions are often not sufficiently related to the previous turn. Reactions to others are muted and infrequent. Pauses notably on "their turn."
	25	**22**	**20**		**18**	**15**	**12**
Fluency (25%)	Speaks exceedingly fluently throughout, with no hesitation or false starts. Complex speech causes no dysfluency.	(mixed)	Speaks fairly fluently throughout although occasional language-related hesitation, repetition or false starts. Can generally produce complex speech without slowing down.				Frequent and/or extended pauses interrupt even simple utterances.
	50	**45**	**40**		**35**	**30**	**25**
Content & Criticality (50%)	Contributions demonstrate deep understanding of the topic and research, with some attribution. Vocabulary and grammar are both complex and accurate, and **speaker can readily rephrase for clarity.** Can incorporate topic card ideas into the discussion seamlessly. **Links relevant contributions and evaluates one's own and others' ideas.**	(mixed)	Contributions show evidence of both research and understanding. Often attempts complex vocabulary and grammar forms with **mixed flexibility.** Can incorporate topic card ideas into the discussion. Demonstrates thoughtful critical evaluation of one's own and others' ideas.				Contributions may be tangential, repeating directly from Lecture, or so vague as to leave the listener in doubt of intended meaning. Language forms are always basic. Reads the topic card aloud without support. Critical evaluation is not attempted.

Considering the Outcomes

The students in University A had a high degree of teacher support, with schedules and lesson content completely within teacher discretion, allowing for extended preparation and washback. As a result, many students could achieve a high score as described in the presentation assessment tool. As students gave their presentations, listening students became aware of their peer's research about a different SDG-related issue, and shared their reactions in written or spoken learning reflections. Presentations about the history and

ethical perspectives of whaling shocked some students. Presentations about the Chernobyl disaster sparked curious discussions. Presentations about civil war in Sudan mostly engendered a kind of silence born of pathos which my students struggled to express in English.

University B's discussion exam also featured a reasonable degree of academic success, considering that the content was more challenging due to the EAP and CLIL requirements. The average grades in these assessments were lower than the average at University A. Students rarely introduced moving or shocking research into the discussion; instead, students debated about solutions to various SDG-related issues in global society, such as how to combat gender inequality, or the merits and methods of transition to renewable energy. These discussions, while difficult, were most engaging for the students when they had exposure or experience regarding an issue. Students became more fluent and used more academic vocabulary when expressing their opinions on issues they cared about, such as the availability of mental health care. This characteristic varied greatly from person to person.

While these responses might indicate some achievement of MEXT goals, I would argue that only half of the pillars of Global Education were truly happening: 1) awareness was certainly raised, and 2) communication skills were imparted by the rigorous study and practice among students. However, the goals of 3) an attitude of cooperation and 4) participation in local or global community action were not evidenced in these projects. The visceral reaction many of us have to learning about traumatic events cannot be equated with that difficult target of a demonstrable, robust spirit of "collaborative decision-making and taking responsibility" (UNESCO, 2014). Simply put, I did not have time in an English-language education setting to allow the students to explore their communities and engage in community action, nor did I find the resources to connect my students in a meaningful way to other cultures which could have influenced their attitudes more profoundly. The SDGs, as a topic and material, were a gateway to the goals of ESD, but not the entire path.

Figure 4

Summary of Outcomes of Comparing two SDG-focused Classroom Practices

	Setting	Content Regulation	Students	Task	Assessment	Results
University A	Private university **Frequent** university-driven promotion of SDGs in events outside class	Teachers self-selected unit topics **Task-based**	High-intermediate **Required** English class with communication emphasis Motivation levels varied	1-2 person research **presentation on SDG issue**	Language skills only	Academic success; high degree of teacher support Global Education goals **50% success**
University B	Private university **Not much** SDG awareness / presence outside class	**SDG topic/content required** for all teachers **EAP**		3-4 person group **discussion on SDG issue**	up to 25% of assessment related to SDG content, 75% language skills assessment	Some academic success Global Education goals **highly variable % success**

Conclusive Reflection

As discussed earlier, this reflective analysis of my own SDG/EFL teaching practice is ultimately guided by two key questions: 1) Why my universities use SDGs so much? and 2) Are the implicit goals of Japan's Ministry of Education are being met? Herein my tentative answers:

Question 1: About the Prevalence of SDGs in EFL

My first insights lead me to believe that that SDGs are popular at the university level for two reasons, and the first is because they serve their purpose well. Divided into 17 interwoven concepts, the SDGs frame vast global problems so as to make solutions more concrete and specific, making them useful tools for educators trying to break down issues for students. They have been translated into dozens of languages and have myriad data resources in Japanese for students to research, to scaffold toward understanding. Global education about genuine, meaningful issues is a way to increase learner motivation, academic outcomes, and connect English lessons to the world outside the classroom (Cates, 2002; Cheng & Cheng, 2012). Like many other educators, I have found that high-intermediate students often self-select SDG topics over such un-controversial ones as "travel" or "media analysis."

The second reason SDGs are so prevalent is the reinforcement from without, as seen in particular at University A. The progress of internationalization is undeniable at many Japanese university campuses, and in more and more cases, the university administration may require English classes to include SDG content, such as at University B. Furthermore, MEXT has had ESD requirements for ages 6-18 in place since 2016, so there is a high likelihood that incoming students have seen and even studied SDGs before. Educators might choose to take advantage of this prior knowledge and connection to the outside world to deepen the impact of learning.

The term "SDG-washing" has been applied recently to initiatives that claim to promote sustainability but are instead merely garnering attention for seeming so. I would disagree with labeling any of the universities described here as such, because the internationalization efforts made by Japanese higher education predate the SDGs, stretching back decades (Kobayashi, 2021), and their funding has been tied to MEXT standards for just as long. Rather, it might be claimed that some Japanese universities are "English-washing" as a stand-in for internationalization, although this claim must be balanced against meaningful developments such as diverse curriculum and multilingual course offerings (Rose & McKinley, 2018). There is evidence that universities may promote EMI classes and EFL programs as the stand-in for sustainability education, implying that improving one's spoken fluency will make a person globally minded and inclined to activism (Brown, 2017; Edwards & Ashida, 2021). As university administrations and MEXT work through various cultural and institutional challenges toward true international cooperation and shared responsibility, the doors are open for educators to take up these principles in our classes.

Question 2: About MEXT's Global Education Goals

Why are the highest ESD goals of imparting responsibility, connectedness, and participation (Cates, 2002; MEXT, 2015) so difficult to reach? These quasi-personality traits are already challenging targets for students in standard language education; adding content-learning goals such as global poverty rates and changing weather patterns makes achieving engaged, global citizenship even harder. It is not surprising that my students failed to exhibit multicultural sensitivity or activism in both universities. There are several limitations in place that I believe stop me, and others like me, from achieving the full range of ESD goals: course scope limitations, time limitations, and lack of teacher expertise. Firstly, educators are rarely given free rein to change a language course into a content-based instruction (CBI) or CLIL course. Students enrolled in a class called "English Writing 4" might expect to use English, but they would perhaps complain to university administration if their

teacher asked them to do research into local plastic recycling startups or join a fundraiser to reduce hunger. Secondly, in cases where a motivated educator does integrate genuine, responsibility-imparting tasks into their English coursework, those tasks are inevitably superseded by language goals. Time and priority must be given to English aptitude development, and teachers often choose to give their students every opportunity to pass tests. The final reason these goals are rarely attempted, and even more rarely achieved, is that language educators are specialized in linguistics and pedagogy but may feel out of their depth when teaching geopolitics, climate science, sociology or any number of fields that the SDGs touch on. In my experience teaching environmental science as a CLIL course in various universities, I have felt this kind of impostor syndrome, as I lacked a degree in the topic I was eager to teach about. This worry, however, is the least of the hurdles for educators to overcome if they want to teach toward true global education outcomes. Demonstrating the communicative capacity to ask questions, seek answers through valid research methods, and admit to not having authority on something, is a much more valuable characteristic in an educator than many realize.

Limitations and Further Recommendations

This study has a number of fundamental limitations, which are mainly due to (a) its qualitative nature and (b) its action-research, self-reflective nature. First of all, my collected data, observations and reflections casted a wide net, spanning a diverse range of aspects of my class practice. This is a result of the exploratory, undefined, questing nature of the study (which, actually, is an essential characteristic of all action research) on which the researcher must simultaneously look for causes and effects. However, this, in turn, could also be construed as a necessary foundational step, because exploratory action research has the potential to set the stage for more precise observations later (Burns, 2009, 2015). Secondly, my very limited cross-confirmation (triangulation) with colleagues might be curtailing the generalizability of my conclusions. I used peer networks to discuss several of the techniques mentioned here and noted when observations were corroborated, but it was done informally. Admittedly, a more systemic triangulation could lead to more robust conclusions. Lastly, this study was done under the premise of using written reflective practice as a key component of critical analysis, on which I constantly questioned my beliefs, practices and professional growth (Farrell, 2018). Nonetheless, the fact that this was perhaps the main method for gathering data about my own teaching is both a strength and a weakness of this study, because the inherently introspective nature of this method cannot possibly account for all relevant aspects to of the studied phenomena.

Regardless, as above-mentioned, the limited nature of the conclusions of this research is a common occurrence of all action research (Burns, 2009). Nevertheless, another key characteristic of this type of research is its cyclical nature; which invites new iterations, possibly in more participatory frameworks, perhaps next time querying the effectiveness of a specific global issues classroom practice, perhaps next time with more systemic triangulation procedures in place. Therefore, the results of this study must be seen merely as the beginning of a conversation about the nature of SDG education.

Under this context, further research is recommended in order to discover the most effective methods of accomplishing all ESD goals at the university level, but a number of educational frameworks offer a foothold from which to get started. For example, Jodoin (2019) recommends a "Language Education for Sustainable Development" approach, which incorporates real world examples, mixed media, and challenging student values & beliefs to bolster their own agency (p.99). The key component of interrogating individual student values could be expanded upon by teaching values and beliefs from other corners of the world. Exposure to other cultures should be as authentic and unfiltered as possible, and reflective questions should encourage students to mentally connect their own life experiences to others' (Cates, 2002; Jodoin, 2019). In addition to propitiating multicultural connections, lessons on shared responsibility and participation in real-world initiatives may not be out of reach. Assigning, or better yet guiding students to conduct their own community-based research or lead their own humanitarian projects outside the classroom may not be a traditional part of English curriculum, but this could be accepted by administrators given the fundamental MEXT and ESD targets. As a possibility, a "Global Citizen" project could assign students reflective English-writing journals as they document their experiences investigating, participating in or promoting community projects. One class per semester could be conducted outside, challenging students to document biodiversity in English and keep tabs on their chosen species. Using video-chat services, students could be partnered with language students in different countries to exchange opinions, correct each other's writing, and reflect on their similarities. In other words, this study sets the stage to showing the way by which the goals of Global Education could become achievable in an internationalized university context, with lessons and activities that integrate learning language and learning to be a global citizen.

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