The Star

Teaching students green values

Sunday, 14 Jul 2024



AS countries around the globe race against time to tackle urgent challenges facing the planet, education has been identified as an important step to address environmental, social and economic issues in a holistic way.

Key to carrying out this game plan are teachers, who guide their students almost daily through their lessons.

According to the Unesco website, education for sustainable development (ESD) is the education sector's response to the planet's urgent and dramatic challenges.



Teachers, said Universiti Malaya Faculty of Education senior lecturer and teacher-trainer Assoc Prof Dr Zuwati Hasim, are well-equipped to weave sustainability values into their lesson plans,regardless of the subject.

Zuwati



“Teachers and teacher-trainees have been given emphasis on how these values can be integrated into their lesson plans based on the topics outlined for the subject matter.

“They should be able to integrate these sustainability concepts into broader teaching strategies and learning activities,” she told StarEdu.

Zuwati, however, noted that training programmes for teachers at colleges and *Fauzi*

universities may vary in their emphasis on sustainability.
She added that sustainability awareness can be emphasised in both informal and formal education.

“Developing sustainability awareness and practices must start at an early age for school students.

“There are many ways to promote awareness and practices in education, such as class projects related to the environment,” she said.

Citing an example, she suggested that teachers could plan science projects on food sources, waste management, biodiversity, or even school garden projects emphasising a green environment.

Zuwati also said students could be exposed to social sustainability through community service projects within the school compound, such as volunteering for school events.

She added that subjects like mathematics, accounting and economics provide good platforms to teach economic sustainability and financial literacy, such as the importance of savings, wise budgeting, and the consequences of overspending.

“Embedding these practices in the existing curriculum helps create a generation of environmentally conscious and socially responsible citizens capable of addressing future sustainability challenges,” she said.

She asserted that a specialised curriculum for sustainability practices is not necessary, as these can be taught by integrating the modelling of good practices from adults.

“Moving away from teaching strictly for the test, and textbook-based lessons, will allow room for teaching creativity and engaging students in critical and creative thinking. Hands-on learning activities will equip them with the skills needed to promote a sustainability mindset,” she said.
According to National Union of the Teaching Profession of Malaysia secretary-general Fouzi Singon, teachers have the opportunity to apply environmental sustainability education across various subjects in the curriculum, especially in science and language subjects.

However, he noted an issue with the incorporation of environmental sustainability education at the curriculum level.

“The main issue is that environmental sustainability education is implemented theoretically in a cursory manner only,” he said.

He suggested fostering appreciation and love for nature through co-curricular activities, especially during annual camps.

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek said the principles of ESD are not merely theoretical but are deeply ingrained in the ministry’s humane education concept.

“Education embodies the cultivation of cognition and character.

“This philosophy underscores the urgency of nurturing holistic development, focusing on academic excellence and cultivating empathy, compassion and responsibility towards society and the environment,” she said in her speech at the opening ceremony of the “ESD for 2030 Regional Meeting on Transforming the Futures of Education” held at Sunway University on July 3.

Her speech was read by Malaysian National Commission for Unesco (MNCU) secretary-general Fadzilah Fadzil.

By integrating ESD principles into educational frameworks, Fadhlina, who is also MNCU president, said Malaysia is paving the way for youths to become proactive leaders for positive change, equipped with critical thinking skills and ethical awareness to address g lobal challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty and inequality.



During the event, United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network president and Mission 4.7 co-chair Prof Jeffrey Sachs said education is the key that unlocks all sustainable development.

“If we do not make the cultivation of cognition and character our central purpose, we will not achieve what we need to

Prof Sachs

achieve, which is aligning our ethics, institutions and technologies so that we can have the future that we want,” he said.

Unesco Regional Office in Jakarta director Maki Katsuno-Hayashikawa said with over 1.2 billion children globally affected by climate change and environmental degradation, it is critical that sustainability is included in education.

“ESD, or target 4.7, truly holds the key to achieving or accelerating the progress towards fulfilling the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda today.

“It is for this very reason that ESD was underscored as one of the key drivers to transform education to meet the needs of the 21st century at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES).”

She also said a Unesco survey found that 92% of national education policies mention sustainable development, yet only 44% of countries have explicitly integrated ESD into their curriculum.

“This gap actually signifies a significant opportunity to enhance educational frameworks to better prepare students for a sustainable future,” she added.



Katsuno-Hayashikawa

Katsuno-Hayashikawa, who is Unesco's representative in Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste, said Unesco has launched two practical greening education tools that outline actionable steps to integrate sustainability into education systems: the "Greening Curriculum Guidance" and the "Green School Quality Standard".

The "Greening Curriculum Guidance" is a guide for teaching and learning that integrates climate mitigation and adaptation across pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary school levels, as well as in teacher training.

The "Green School Quality Standard" is an initiative that provides a quality standard for greening schools and other learning environments.

It is essential to teach students about sustainability at the school level in order to instil lifelong habits and values, said Zuwati.

"Early exposure to sustainability fosters environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic awareness, preparing students to make ethical and informed decisions," she concluded.

Eco-friendly initiatives

Our school is high-density and with so many people, we would produce a lot of waste. Hence, we avoid using single-use plastic. Most of our teachers and students bring their own food containers to the canteen to buy food or drinks. The canteen also sells drinks in reusable cups to avoid using disposable plastic or paper cups.

Chua Yong Xia, Han Chiang High School, Penang

Our school stopped using polystyrene many years ago, even before Selangor banned the use of polystyrene containers in 2017. Plastic bags are also not allowed in the canteen, so students have to bring their own containers and cutlery if they want to pack their food. We started recycling many years ago, with students in charge of recycling their classroom waste assigned in each class. Once a week, these students bring their items to the recycling centre at the school for recycling. We have also installed solar panels on all four blocks of our school. This is a way to educate our students about green energy.

Boo Chuan Yen, Hin Hua High School, Selangor

As teachers, we can integrate sustainability into our lessons. For example, when teaching English, we can discuss how to save the planet. Students can write essays on how to preserve the environment. In the Form One and Form Two ‘Pulse’ textbooks, there is a chapter on wild weather. This is a very good platform to discuss current weather challenges and their global impact.

Dr Doreen Premila Rajamoney, SMK Pedas, Negri Sembilan