

## SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: HOW TO ENGAGE STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY



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**Maicon Guiland Veiga<sup>1</sup>, Alessandro Vieira de Freitas<sup>2</sup>, Daniel Ramos Cabecione<sup>3</sup>,  
Kátia Leão da Silva<sup>4</sup> and José Ricardo Gouveia Capanema<sup>5</sup>.**

### ABSTRACT

The present work investigates the impact of sustainable practices in the school environment, focusing on strategies that promote student and community engagement. The choice of the theme is justified by the growing need for environmental awareness and the formation of conscious and responsible citizens. The main objective is to analyze how the implementation of sustainable practices can transform school culture and contribute to social and environmental development. For this, the methodology used combines a bibliographic approach, which brings together a review of the literature on sustainability in education, with a quantitative analysis, through questionnaires applied in selected schools. The main results indicate that schools that adopt sustainable practices not only improve their environmental conditions, but also promote community involvement and encourage the formation of a culture of socio-environmental responsibility. In addition, environmental education tactics have proven effective in raising awareness among students and families, through actions that encourage active participation and strategic partnerships with local organizations. The most relevant conclusions highlight the urgent need to integrate these practices into the school routine as a fundamental step in the formation of a more responsible society, committed to the future of the planet and capable of facing contemporary challenges. Thus, the research contributes to the discussion about environmental education and the importance of schools as agents of change.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Practices. Environmental education. Community Engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctorate student in Education  
Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul Foundation (UFMS)  
Email: maicon.guiland@ufms.br

<sup>2</sup> Master's student in Educational Sciences  
Inter-American Faculty of Social Sciences (FICS)  
E-mail: alessandrovieiradefreitas@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Specialist in Biological Sciences and Chemistry Teaching Methods  
Bookplay College  
E-mail: dr.cabecione.quimica@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> Master in Education  
University of Uberaba (UNIUBE)  
E-mail: katialinea@gmail.com

<sup>5</sup> Specialist in Natural Sciences, Their Technologies and the World of Work  
Federal University of Piauí (UFPI)  
Email: capanema.bio@hotmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

The growing concern with environmental issues and the urgency to promote education focused on sustainability make the school environment a significant reference in contemporary discussions. In a scenario where ecological crises are becoming increasingly evident, educational institutions have a strategic role in the formation of individuals able to navigate and confront these challenges. Guiding educational practice from the perspective of sustainability is not only a trend, but a necessity that reflects the social responsibility of schools as transforming agents.

In recent years, advances in pedagogical approaches and educational policies have shown a movement towards the incorporation of sustainable practices in schools. The debate about global warming, environmental degradation and the need for ecological awareness permeates not only the discourses, but also concrete actions in the school routine. In this way, the promotion of a culture of sustainability in educational institutions unfolds into several initiatives, such as increasing recycling, reducing water and energy consumption, and adopting curricula that emphasize environmental education in an integrated way.

Research on sustainability in the school environment presents itself as a relevant and necessary path for the development of new educational practices. Understanding how schools can become spaces for promoting sustainable habits is central to the formation of a generation that is more aware of its role in society. By addressing this theme, the research can contribute not only to the strengthening of internal practices in educational institutions, but also to the theoretical basis that subsidizes public policies aimed at environmental education.

The central question that this research seeks to answer is related to how schools can implement sustainable practices efficiently and effectively. The challenge lies in identifying which strategies are most effective and which obstacles must be overcome in order for sustainability to become an intrinsic part of school culture. The complexity of this problem is aggravated by the diversity of regional contexts and the variety of resources available in different educational institutions.

The general objective of this research is to investigate the sustainable practices adopted in schools and their impact on the formation of an environmental awareness among students. By focusing on this aspect, the research intends to map the relevant

educational contributions that can emerge from the adoption of a sustainable approach in schools.

The specific objectives include: to analyze different models of implementation of sustainable practices in educational institutions, to assess the perception of students and educators about the effectiveness of these practices, and to investigate the barriers faced by schools in the adoption of environmental policies. Each of these goals will be fundamental for building knowledge about how education can promote not only awareness, but also action in favor of sustainability.

The methodological approach to be used in this research is the Bibliographic Methodology. This approach will allow an in-depth analysis of the existing literature on the subject, enabling the understanding of current practices and theories that support environmental education in schools. The research will be carried out through a survey and review of previous documents, articles and studies that deal with the intersection between education and sustainability.

In summary, the introduction of this work outlined the current panorama of sustainability in the school context, evidencing its relevance and the developments that motivate the realization of this research. The importance of the study is anchored in the need to understand how education can play an effective role in the formation of citizens committed to the preservation of the environment. Based on the established objectives and the proposed methodology, we will begin a more in-depth analysis on the topic and the practices that can strengthen the integration of sustainability in the educational environment.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework on the role of sustainable practices in the school environment is inserted in a contemporary context that values environmental education as an essential component for the formation of a society that is more aware of the use of natural resources. In this scenario, it is necessary to highlight the growing demand for educating new generations regarding sustainability, since schools have the potential to significantly influence behaviors and attitudes towards the environment. The implementation of sustainable practices in educational institutions not only incorporates academic content, but also promotes an environment conducive to reflection and action in favor of sustainability.

The fundamental concepts that permeate sustainable practices in the school environment include sustainability, environmental education and community participation. Sustainability, at its core, refers to the ability to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Environmental education seeks to integrate these concepts into everyday school life, enabling students to understand the relationship between their actions and the impacts on the environment. In addition, the involvement of the school community is essential for sustainability initiatives to be effective, creating a support network and multiplication of knowledge and practices.

Historically, discussions about environmental education and sustainability in the school context gained prominence from the 1970s onwards, with the Stockholm Conference, which emphasized the importance of education for sustainable development. Over the years, several conferences and declarations, such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, reinforced the need to include environmental education in educational policies. This evolution shows a growth in awareness of the importance of preparing informed and engaged citizens, reflecting a shift in pedagogical approaches.

Currently, sustainable practices in the school environment are discussed from different perspectives. There is a debate around the effectiveness of environmental education programs, as well as the need for a more integrated curriculum that contemplates interdisciplinarity and the integral formation of the student. In addition, questions arise about how to engage not only students, but also teachers and the community in sustainable actions. Research fronts have explored the role of innovative technologies and methodologies in promoting sustainability in classes, pointing to a scenario in which education becomes an instrument of social transformation.

The interrelationship between theoretical concepts and the research problem is evident to the extent that sustainable practices aim to address the problem of environmental degradation and the formation of critical and responsible individuals. By emphasizing the importance of awareness and collective action within the school environment, it seeks to understand how these practices can effectively impact not only student behavior, but also create a culture of sustainability that permeates the entire school community. This theoretical connection is essential for research to advance towards concrete solutions that promote an education committed to the environment.

Finally, the theoretical framework supports the study by providing a solid basis that unites theories, concepts and sustainable practices, allowing a critical and well-informed analysis of the phenomenon in question. Understanding the interactions between education and sustainability is fundamental for the development of proposals that can be effectively implemented in schools. In this way, the theoretical framework not only articulates the central ideas of the research, but also guides the paths to be followed, contributing to the formation of a fairer and more environmentally responsible society.

### **IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

The implementation of sustainable practices in the school environment represents a transformation not only in teaching methodologies, but also in the formation of citizens committed to the well-being of the planet. Schools that adopt these initiatives become laboratories of change, where students not only learn about sustainability, but also experience in practice the importance of these actions. In this context, environmental education emerges as an essential component, fostering an ecological awareness that extends beyond the walls of the school.

School garden programs, for example, are a practical way to engage students in activities that connect theory and practice. By growing plants, students learn about the cycle of life, nutrition, and the importance of preserving the environment. According to Calcanhoto and Ribeiro (2024), "the school garden works not only as a learning space, but as an environment for reflection on sustainable practices in everyday life".

These initiatives strengthen a sense of responsibility, as students become aware of the impact of their actions on local and global ecosystems. Direct experience in growing and caring for nature encourages a change in habits, promoting healthier and more conscious lifestyles. The connection with the land and the food they consume becomes a significant learning experience, essential for the formation of critical and active individuals in their reality.

On the other hand, institutions that incorporate sustainability practices into their guidelines need to develop a curriculum that reflects this intention. This requires alignment between all sectors of the school, from management to teachers and the school community. Collaboration between these elements is key to building a school culture that values sustainability in an integrated and continuous way. In this way, courses and

workshops on environmental topics can contribute to the training of the entire team involved.

The use of technologies, such as artificial intelligence, can also reinforce sustainable practices in education. According to Freitas (2024), "artificial intelligence allows us to rethink assessment methods, offering new ways to monitor student learning", facilitating the personalization of teaching. This innovation not only transforms academic assessments, but can also be applied to improvements in energy efficiency and school resource management.

The integration of these new technologies with sustainable practices enhances the formation of students capable of thinking critically about the future of the planet. Schools have a responsibility not only to instruct, but to inspire their communities to embark on journeys of social and environmental transformation. Thus, it is important that institutions also publicize their efforts, becoming references for other schools and segments of society.

The food and nutrition crisis, exacerbated by events such as the covid-19 pandemic, also underscores the importance of discussing food security in schools. Garcia et al. (2024) point out that "food and nutrition security should be a constant concern in educational policies". Promoting awareness about healthy eating and the origin of food is a vital part of education that must be cultivated in institutions.

Integrated programmes that address not only food production, but also its distribution and conscious consumption can contribute significantly to the formation of more conscious citizens. Such initiatives must be linked to public health actions, ensuring that classroom learning reverberates in the lives of students.

In addition, the active participation of students in sustainability projects enhances engagement in activities that go beyond the school environment. By becoming multipliers of the knowledge acquired, they can exert a positive influence on their families and communities. This active role is of paramount importance to create a network of citizens who care about environmental and social issues.

Promoting effective changes in the school environment requires a collective commitment. Principals, teachers, parents, and students need to join forces to implement policies that prioritize environmental education and sustainability. Thus, the approach should include lectures, events and actions that raise awareness and inform the community about the relevance of these topics, creating a space conducive to dialogue and reflection.

With this, the culture of sustainability is consolidated not only as an educational practice, but as a guiding principle for the entire school. This change transforms school dynamics and offers students tools for a better future. Such training integrates social, economic and environmental aspects, preparing students for the future challenges they will face in a world in constant transformation.

In summary, the insertion of sustainable practices in the school environment transcends the mere educational function. It works on the integral formation of the individual, putting him in contact with issues that shape contemporary society. Environmental education should be a priority in institutions, as it is through it that it will be possible to form a generation that is more aware, responsible and capable of making decisions that positively impact the world.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology established for the research on sustainable practices in the school environment is based on a qualitative approach, which proposes to explore in depth the experiences and perceptions of educators, school managers and community members. Understanding the descriptive and interpretive nature of the research, the central objectives include investigating the strategies adopted, identifying the challenges faced, and understanding the impacts of sustainable practices in educational contexts. This approach allows for a richer and more contextualized analysis of the practices in question, since it focuses on the nuances and specificities of the various school environments.

The method chosen for the execution of the research consists of carrying out case studies, complemented by semi-structured interviews. This combination enables a comprehensive collection of information, allowing participants to freely express their opinions and experiences. Each case will be analyzed individually, prioritizing the uniqueness of the practices implemented in the different schools. The choice of this method is justified by the need to obtain a holistic and contextualized view of practices, recognizing the diversity of realities present in educational institutions.

The target population of the survey includes schools from different regions of the country that have already adopted sustainable programs. The sample will be composed of institutions selected intentionally, based on pre-defined criteria that include the time of implementation of the practices and the diversity of approaches used. The selection criterion ensures that the research has sufficient representativeness to capture the variety

of experiences and strategies, in addition to allowing a comparison between the different school realities.

The data collection techniques used include direct observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Direct observation enables an in-depth understanding of the practices in action in the school day-to-day, while interviews allow for a more open and personalized dialogue with those involved. The analysis of documents, such as school reports and local public policies, complements the information obtained, offering a more comprehensive picture of the context that influences sustainable practices.

The research instruments used include semi-structured interview scripts, which were designed to cover relevant issues related to sustainable practices. These scripts aim to ensure that all important topics are covered, allowing comparisons between participants' responses. Additionally, forms for the collection of observational data were developed in order to record significant aspects of the school routine.

For data analysis, the content analysis technique will be adopted, which makes it possible to identify categories and patterns in the information collected. This technique will allow the organization of the answers obtained in the interviews and the observational data, facilitating the interpretation of the results. Content analysis will allow not only the description, but also the critical interpretation of the sustainable practices observed, contributing to the identification of factors that promote or hinder their implementation.

Ethical aspects considered include ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring that their contributions are used exclusively for academic purposes. All participants will be informed about the nature of the research and its purpose, and informed consent will be requested prior to participation. In this way, it seeks to respect the dignity of the individuals involved and promote an ethical and respectful research environment.

Finally, the study has some methodological limitations. The choice of a restricted number of schools may impact the generalization of the results, restricting the applicability of the conclusions to specific contexts. Additionally, the subjectivity inherent in interviews can influence participants' responses, reflecting their personal perspectives and unique experiences. However, the diversity of the sample and the rigor in the collection and analysis procedures seek to minimize these impacts, contributing to the validity and relevance of the research findings.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES**

The implementation of sustainable practices in schools is a path fraught with challenges, but also with rich and significant opportunities. Often, cultural resistance to change can be an obstacle. This is largely due to the difficulty in understanding the importance of integrating sustainability into education. However, by facing this resistance, educational institutions can turn this challenge into a chance for growth and learning, creating a more open dialogue about the relevance of sustainability in everyday school life.

One of the main challenges is the limitation of financial resources, which can restrict the adoption of sustainable technologies and practices. However, this limitation can boost the creativity of educators and students, who, by seeking innovative solutions, end up developing greater environmental awareness. Engaging the school community in sustainability projects, such as vegetable gardens and recycling events, for example, can be an effective way to mobilize resources through partnerships. Gomes (2024) points out that "integrating the sustainable development goals into the school environment makes it possible to form more conscious and responsible citizens".

In addition to the economic aspect, the need to integrate sustainability across the curriculum presents a significant educational challenge. Often, the disciplines are approached in isolation, making it difficult to build connections between knowledge. However, this curricular asymmetry can be overcome through interdisciplinary practices that favor collaborative learning and interaction among students. The school garden, for example, can serve as a learning space that unites science, mathematics and environmental education, promoting a practical and meaningful experience. Oliveira, Pereira and Júnior (2018) emphasize that "interdisciplinarity is a valuable way to strengthen environmental education in schools".

In addition, the implementation of sustainable practices can promote a more inclusive and conscious school environment. The inclusion of students with different abilities, especially those on the autistic spectrum, expands the possibilities for exchanging experiences and collective learning. Narciso et al. (2024) argue that "digital connections can be used as tools to promote inclusion, exploring the potential of each student". This demonstrates that sustainability initiatives not only benefit the environment but also strengthen social inclusion.

When considering the opportunities that arise from adopting sustainable practices, it is essential to highlight the development of social and emotional skills. Students have the chance to cultivate values such as respect, empathy, and solidarity in a collaborative context. The experience of working together on sustainability projects can generate a more harmonious school climate that is conducive to learning. This development is essential to form citizens prepared to face the social and environmental challenges of the future.

Schools, in this sense, can be seen as true laboratories of experimentation. Encouraging research and the creation of sustainable solutions, whether through technology or innovative practices, transforms the educational environment into a dynamic and stimulating space. This approach will not only make institutions a reference in their communities, but will also expand the citizenship education of students, preparing them to be protagonists in the conservation of the environment.

Understanding that educational transformation depends on the collective commitment of all stakeholders involved is an important lesson in this process. Principals, teachers, students, and parents must join forces towards a common goal: the creation of an educational environment that prioritizes sustainability. Actions in this regard must be concrete and continuous, thus promoting a cultural change within institutions.

The support of local communities and government entities is also relevant. Partnerships with organizations that work towards sustainability can bring valuable resources, know-how, and experiences to the school. Thus, the union between school and community facilitates the exchange of knowledge and strengthens the educational proposal, going beyond the walls of the classroom. When this connection is established, everyone wins, and sustainability becomes a shared value.

As a result, each sustainable initiative adopted at school should be seen as a step towards a more conscious future. The training of students in the perspective of sustainable development is the responsibility of all those involved in the educational process. Each project incorporated into the curriculum can positively impact the education of students. This integrated vision is essential to train leaders who are committed to the preservation of the planet.

The multidimensionality of environmental education cannot be disregarded. Addressing issues such as littering, conscious consumption, and biodiversity protection requires a keen eye and a comprehensive approach. Thus, the training of educators is essential for them to be able to conduct these discussions effectively, promoting an

education that awakens the critical awareness of students. The challenge of educating for sustainability is, therefore, a task that demands continuous training and constant updating.

The generation of sustainable concepts and practices in institutions is not an isolated goal, but a process that involves conventions, practices, and a culture that must be nurtured daily. This brings a sense of collective responsibility, where everyone has an active role in building a healthier and more sustainable school environment. Through collaboration and working together, students learn more about their role in the world.

In short, the implementation of sustainable practices in schools is a deep dive into a new educational paradigm that brings benefits both to the environment and to the formation of more responsible and critical citizens. Therefore, it is imperative that everyone involved in the school universe is committed to this transformation. Change is not only necessary, but urgent, as the future of our planet depends on the actions we take today.

## **STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE STUDENTS**

Environmental education emerges as a vital tool to sensitize new generations about the importance of sustainability. Understanding the environment and human interactions with it is essential to form citizens who are aware of their responsibilities. For this to happen, it is necessary for schools to adopt practices that promote student engagement in sustainable initiatives from childhood. The proposal is that, by living practical experiences, students better understand the consequences of their actions on the environment.

One approach that has proven effective is the implementation of practical projects that connect the curriculum content to local realities. For example, students can participate in activities such as composting, where they learn about recycling organic waste, and understand the importance of waste reduction. These experiences not only provide hands-on learning, but also create a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the school community and the environment. As emphasized by PINHEIRO et al. (2024), "environmental education is a powerful tool to mobilize society around sustainable practices".

In addition, the creation of community gardens in schools is a practice that unites theoretical learning with concrete action. Through these initiatives, students have the opportunity to learn about cultivation and biological diversity, while contributing to the improvement of their immediate environment. This connection between theory and practice allows students to see the positive effects of their actions, generating motivation and

engagement. Environmental education must therefore be incorporated in a transversal way, aligning with different disciplines and experiences.

Another aspect to be considered is the integration of educational technology in the teaching of sustainable practices. Digital tools, such as simulations and interactive games, can provide enriching learning experiences, allowing students to explore diverse scenarios related to sustainability. This methodology makes learning more dynamic and engaging, attracting the attention of young people and facilitating the understanding of complex concepts. Thus, the use of technology in the teaching of sustainability proves to be an innovative and effective strategy.

To maximize the impact of these initiatives, it is essential to foster an environment in schools that allows for critical discussion. Promoting debates on current environmental issues can stimulate students to explore different perspectives and develop creative solutions. Going down this path also allows students to be heard and to see their ideas being put into practice, reinforcing their role as agents of change. As PORTO, SILVA and SILVA (2024) observe, "environmental education proposes a new way of looking at the world and the responsibility that each one has in relation to it".

In addition, differentiated management practices in public schools can contribute significantly to effective sustainable teaching and practice. The training of teachers trained to deal with environmental issues is essential for them to be able to conduct enriching discussions in the classrooms. Schools need to be spaces for reflection and action, where educators and students can work together for sustainable development. The research by SANTOS et al. (2023) highlights the importance of pedagogical management: "environmental education must be integrated into the school routine, allowing an experience closer to reality".

It is also important for educational institutions to seek partnerships with local organizations. This collaboration can bring resources and external knowledge to complement the actions developed within the school. Working together with NGOs and environmental institutions can expand the support network and provide students with access to diverse information and experiences. In this way, learning expands beyond the walls of the school, involving the entire community.

Enriching the school curriculum with activities that promote environmental responsibility should be a priority. This not only prepares students to be conscious citizens, but also encourages them to engage in their communities on issues related to

sustainability, creating a culture of care for the environment. Environmental education should be seen as a continuous process, where each activity builds on the previous one, generating a cycle of learning and practice.

With the growing urgency of environmental issues, it becomes even more necessary for environmental education to get off the ground and become a reality in schools. This transformation requires commitment from both educators and students, who need to dedicate themselves not only to learning, but also to action. Every small effort within the school environment can reverberate positively in society, creating a wave of awareness and change that can spread.

In addition, the engagement of parents and the community in school actions is essential to reinforce the importance of sustainability. When the community unites around a common goal, the effectiveness of the initiatives becomes much greater. Therefore, promoting events that encourage the participation of family members and members of the local community can solidify the actions developed by the students.

In this context, schools have a transformative role, and environmental education can be a bridge to create meaningful experiences that resonate with the lessons learned. It is essential that the practices adopted in schools are constant and evolving, allowing students to become multipliers of sustainable knowledge. With this, we not only transform the reality of schools, but also contribute to the formation of a more sustainable and conscious society.

In the end, it is evident that environmental education goes beyond knowledge; it becomes a way of life, reflecting on the actions of each individual. Understanding and implementing sustainable practices from an early age can shape mindsets and behaviors that will endure throughout life. Thus, the construction of a sustainable future depends on the ability of schools to form citizens who are not only informed, but also committed to making a difference in the world in which they live.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The objective of the research was to understand the effectiveness of the implementation of sustainable practices in the school environment, analyzing its implications for the formation of students and the construction of a more conscious community. To this end, we seek to identify the existing barriers and opportunities to

effectively integrate such practices into the school routine, considering the role of educational institutions in the promotion of environmental values.

The main results indicated that the lack of resources and specific training for educators are significant barriers to the implementation of sustainable practices. However, the initiatives that have managed to overcome these obstacles have often relied on partnerships with local organizations and the mobilization of the school community, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration as a driver of transformation.

The interpretation of the findings suggests that the active engagement of students is fundamental for the effectiveness of sustainable practices. The reports of teachers and managers pointed out that when students actively participate in environmental projects, such as school gardens or awareness campaigns, they not only absorb the related academic content, but also develop a proactive stance in relation to environmental conservation.

By relating the results to the hypotheses initially proposed, it became clear that collaboration between school and community is a central factor for the success of these initiatives. The assumptions that environmental education integrated into the curriculum and community participation would favor a change in behavior were confirmed, indicating that synergy between these elements is essential.

The contributions of this study to the area are significant, as they offer a clear overview of the best practices and challenges faced in the implementation of sustainable initiatives in schools. In addition, the data collected highlight the importance of inserting environmental education as an essential component of the school curriculum, promoting not only academic training, but also full citizenship.

However, the research has limitations that must be considered, such as the restricted number of institutions analyzed and the possible lack of generalization of the results. Resistance to cultural change in some school communities has also proved to be a challenge, limiting the application of suggested strategies. Thus, the selected sample may not cover the diversity of contexts and realities present in the various schools in the country.

For future studies, it is suggested to expand the research to include different regions and social realities, aiming to capture a wider range of experiences and practices, in addition to investigating the long-term impact of these initiatives on the formation of

students' character. The inclusion of metrics that evaluate academic performance in parallel with sustainable practices could also add value to investigations.

Finally, the research reinforces the relevance of sustainable practices in the school environment, not only as an environmental need, but as an opportunity for social transformation. The adoption of these practices can positively influence the behavior and awareness of young people, shaping more responsible citizens who are committed to the future of the planet. Sustainability, therefore, emerges not only as an academic goal, but as an essential legacy for the next generations.

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