

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71634/mcz7wh34>

*Journal of
Scholarship and Innovation in
Management Education*

Issue 2, 2025
© The Author(s) 2025



This work is licensed
under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

From Classroom to Boardroom: Exploring the Impact of Environmental Education on Career Intentions of Entrepreneurship Students

Shreeyaa Khatri, Jennifer Raechel Scrivener

Corresponding Author

Jennifer Raechel Scrivener, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YW

Email: j.carter@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract

Higher education plays a crucial role in sustainable thinking and development. With ever increasing pressures of environmental challenges, entrepreneurship students will be looked to for responsible leadership and innovative problem-solving in their futures. This research explores the impact of environmental education on the career intentions of undergraduate entrepreneurship students. Through the thematic analysis of qualitative interviews, the study highlights the ethical-financial dilemma students face in embracing their university-enhanced eco-consciousness when searching for their graduate career.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship education, environmental education, sustainability, career intentions

Introduction

With the number of current pressing environmental challenges that the world experiences, from climate crises to resource depletion, there is no better time to understand how education shapes the green ethos of future leaders. This was the focus of one undergraduate student's dissertation, aiming to unravel the role environmental education plays on the aspirations of budding leaders.

Higher Education Institutions are increasingly acknowledged for their important contribution to promoting sustainable development and integrating environmental education ([Feng, 2012](#); [Rauf et al., 2021](#); [Severo et al., 2019](#)). This equips students with the essential knowledge, abilities, and principles that are vital to successfully navigate the business landscape ahead, leading the transition towards a more sustainable future ([Barth et al., 2007](#); [Tilbury, 2011](#)). But as the ink dries on their degrees and they stride into professional life, do these green-minded graduates still hold onto their eco-conscious ethos?

Research Approach

A rich qualitative study explored the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of entrepreneurship students at Lancaster University Management School. It focused on how environmental

education affects undergraduate career decisions and ethical decision-making processes. The dissertation study involved semi-structured interviews with seven final-year undergraduate students majoring in Entrepreneurship. These interviews were analysed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step, systematic approach of thematic analysis, where themes were defined as recurring patterns or significant concepts related to the research question.

Findings & Discussion

One of the core insights of the study was how student mindsets are demonstrably influenced by the environmental education they receive during their course. The participants all recognised that their courses motivated them to consider sustainability goals and understand the environmental factors key to modern business strategies and branding. This was shown through their enhanced ethical consciousness and intention to implement sustainable behaviours, including their duty toward the environment and sustainability. Therefore, the students felt that environmental awareness is powerful and were satisfied with the integration overall.

However, they raised that a deeper exploration of sustainability issues and challenges would have benefitted them. Workable suggestions for this included an opportunity for more serious discussion and debate amongst students, enabling the challenging of opinions rather than simply absorbing information; thus, developing higher-order thinking skills to facilitate responsible identities and actions (Miri, David & Uri, 2007). So, environmental education can be seen to foster strong feelings of responsibility.

But there is a catch. When these eager, motivated minds walk into the 'real world', they are often faced with challenges that education has not prepared them for. Most of the participants, while showing heightened environmental consciousness, also acknowledged their inability to action them at the early stages of their careers. The student's shared how job searching presents a conflict between personal values, practical considerations, and the context of how sustainability is being discussed in the corporate world.

It is evident that despite heightened levels of environmental awareness and knowledge, financial considerations often take precedence in the early stages of entering the workforce. Most of the time, money and "survival" (i.e., the ability to afford the basic necessities of food and shelter) take the front seat, prioritised over the green ideals learned in business school.

Moreover, the demands of the workplace do not always align with their green ideals. This particularly impacted the students' considerations of where to work after graduating. Previous research has found that high percentages of the population want to work for a company that demonstrates environmental consciousness (Odell, 2007). This sentiment was echoed by one of the participants, 'Karan', who explicitly stated their preference for organisational roles that account for sustainability considerations. However, others interviewed regarded job searching differently. 'Rose' had originally held this belief, avoiding controversial companies due to their standards for sustainability. When they were unsuccessful with their applications to environmentally conscious companies, 'Rose' felt they had no choice but to lower their standards to secure meaningful employment. This was a pragmatic decision, epitomising the student dilemma between ideological choices and the need for a job.

Another student, 'James', challenged this moral notion that one should not work for a company that has poor commitments to the environment. He offers a strategic perspective of engaging with the non-eco-friendly companies, using his own knowledge and motivations to enact change from within. This suggests James could be seen as a 'tempered radical', defined as "individuals

who identify with and are committed to their organisations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organisation” ([Meyerson and Scully, 1995, p.586](#)). By enacting social change through behaviours which go against typical organisational norms, tempered radicals aim to reframe perspectives more in line with their own ideology ([Bajaba et al, 2023](#)). James believes that the implication of not working with companies that have poor environmental standards can be seen as counterproductive to the goal of broader systemic sustainability.

Overall, the students held a unified belief that their environmental impact is restricted until they are at least in a managerial position, where they will have the authority and trust of others to enact change. This directly contrasts Shephard et al. (2015), who posit that individuals who demonstrate an in-depth understanding of sustainability principles upon commencing their professional careers hold the capacity to exert a substantial influence on the trajectory of organisations. Student perception is that knowledge is not enough, with job security and positions of power needed for advocacy and enforcement of environmental ideals. Despite this belief, the interviews show commitment to environmental consciousness. The students intend to engage in and implement environmental stewardship at later stages in their careers when they are confidently in positions of power, with job and financial security.

Conclusion

The study revealed the contradictions and challenges for students in implementing their environmental education into their future careers. From this, one thing becomes abundantly clear: the seeds of sustainability are being sown in the corridors of entrepreneurship education. Thus, every classroom discussion, every tweak of the curriculum, every peer and faculty interaction, contributes to creating business leaders who will enact responsibility towards the environment.

This study inspires the entrepreneurship educators at Lancaster to embed sustainability, responsibility, and the environment into every aspect of the programme. But more than this, the study inspires the difficult conversations, the challenging of opinions and beliefs, and the reflection on who we are and our place in society. To achieve this, the educators will take a programmatic approach, where activities can be coordinated to build environmental awareness over multiple years. It will move beyond ‘definitions’ and ‘implementations’ of sustainability, emphasising ‘discourse’ for a more inclusive and substantial integration ([Scarff Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017](#)). Debates will be a core part of the initiative. Their focus on reasoning over viewpoint creates an empathetic space more open to multiple perspectives and experiences, while their emphasis on critical thinking encourages the challenging of assumptions, values and behaviours – including the students own ([Kennedy, 2009](#)). This interactive and transformative pedagogical approach, alongside experiential methods like case studies and place-based projects, will enhance the sustainability education of entrepreneurship students ([Lozano et al, 2017](#)). Only by deepening our exploration of these concepts can we encourage our students to face these contradictions and challenges with hope of a better, greener, tomorrow through systemic change ([Sandri, 2022](#)).

References

- Bajaba, S., Fuller, B., Simmering, M.J., Haynie, J., Ring, J.K. and Bajaba, A., (2023). How tempered radicals pursue ideological change in organizations. *Current Psychology*, 42(20), pp.16932-16949.
- Barth, M., Godemann, J., Rieckmann, M. and Stoltenberg, U. (2007) "Developing key competencies for sustainable development in higher education", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 8(4), pp. 416-430.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Feng, L. (2012) "Teacher and student responses to interdisciplinary aspects of sustainability education: what do we really know?", *Environmental education research*, 18(1), pp. 31–43.
- Kennedy, R. (2009) "The power of in-class debate", *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 10(1), pp.225-236.
- Lozano, R., Merrill, M.Y., Sammalisto, K., Ceulemans, K. and Lozano, F.J., (2017). Connecting competences and pedagogical approaches for sustainable development in higher education: A literature review and framework proposal. *Sustainability*, 9(10), p.1889.
- Meyerson, D.E. and Scully, M.A., (1995). Crossroads tempered radicalism and the politics of ambivalence and change. *Organization science*, 6(5), pp.585-600.
- Miri, B., David, B.C. and Uri, Z. (2007) "Purposely teaching for the promotion of higher-order thinking skills: A case of critical thinking", *Research in Science Education*, 37, pp. 353-369.
- Odell, A. M. 2007, October 16. "Working for the Earth: Green Companies and Green Jobs Attract Employees." Available at: <https://trellis.net/article/working-earth-green-companies-and-green-jobs-attract-employees/>
- Rauf, R., Wijaya, H. and Tari, E. (2021) "Entrepreneurship education based on environmental insight: Opportunities and challenges in the new normal era", *Cogent arts & humanities*, 8(1)
- Sandri, O. (2022) What do we mean by 'pedagogy' in sustainability education?, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(1), pp.114-129
- Seatter, C.S. and Ceulemans, K., 2017. Teaching sustainability in higher education: Pedagogical styles that make a difference. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 47(2), pp.47-70.
- Severo, E., Becker, A., Guimarães, J.C.F.D., and Rotta, C. (2019). "The teaching of innovation and environmental sustainability and its relationship with entrepreneurship in Southern Brazil", *International Journal of Innovation and Learning*, 25(1) pp.78-105.
- Shephard, K., Harraway, J., Lovelock, B., Miroso, M., Skeaff, S., Slooten, L., Strack, M., Furnari, M., Jowett, T. and Deaker, L. (2015) "Seeking learning outcomes appropriate for 'education for sustainable development' and for higher education", *Assessment and evaluation in higher education*, 40(6), pp. 855–866.
- Tilbury, D. (2011). "Education for sustainable development: An expert review of processes and learning". UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000191442>
-

Author Profile

Shreeyaa Khatri is a recent graduate of Lancaster University with a BSc in Management and Entrepreneurship. Her research explores the impact of environmental education on entrepreneurial mindsets. Passionate about sustainability and innovation, she is actively gaining experience in entrepreneurship with the goal of becoming a serial entrepreneur.

Jennifer Raechel Scrivener is a Teaching Fellow in the Entrepreneurship and Strategy Department of Lancaster University Management School. Jennifer is interested in entrepreneurial learning and education. She is passionate about developing a valuable, thought-provoking curriculum to enhance the entrepreneurial mindset and professional capabilities of students.

ORCID iDs

Jennifer Raechel Scrivener <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8518-677X>

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.