Sustainable Development Goals in EFL Students' Learning: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Involving the global issues as listed in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education is necessarily done in the education process, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Exposure to global issues is known to improve students' understanding, awareness, and ability to solve urgent issues faced by global society. This paper aims to find out the trend of research on the coverage of SDGs in students' learning process. This systematic literature analysis was done by applying Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Method. A total of 25 studies were recognized through a systematic search by using Sustainability, SDGs, and EFL as keywords. The result shows that the trend of associating SDGs with EFL settings was done mostly in Indonesia. In the recent year 2022, it reached the highest number of studies in the particular matter with 7 total of research. It was also found that the study involving SDGs on EFL learning was mostly done in the tertiary setting, compared with K-12, junior high school, secondary, high school, and other educational institutions. It was also discovered that the specific area of study enhances EFL students' learning achievement, environmental awareness, global citizen values, as well as students' levels of self-norms, beliefs, and self-value.

Keywords: English as Foreign Language learning, PRISMA, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

As a global community, we can no longer stem the tide of rapid transformation or globalization. Global challenges are exacerbated by globalization, which is a consequence of the evolution of social life standards over time. According to its definition, global challenges refers to challenges, problems, issues, or other recent developments that can affect human life (Gelsdorf, 2010).

The global challenges society encounters in the 21st century are diverse, ranging from environmental issues, socioeconomic disparities, access to technology, health, social structures, community, and Unity (Ainscough et al., 2021; Shaheed, 2021). In 2015, the United Nations (UN) released a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at fulfilling world peace and prosperity. SDGs initially consisted of 17 objectives that were disseminated to all UN members (United Nations, 2015). SDGs have been a focus of attention in 178 countries across the globe (Centre for Environment Education, 2007). Also known as Agenda 21, these goals comprise a comprehensive plan of action to form a worldwide partnership for sustainable development.

These 17 goals are to end poverty, end hunger, create a society with high levels of health and well-being, give everyone a good education, ensure gender equality, practice good hygiene and clean water, make energy accessible and clean, create good jobs and grow economies, improve the industry, technology, and physical infrastructure, reduce inequality, and make cities and communities with sustainable consumption and production, taking action against climate change, existence below the water and on the land, taking care of peace, justice, and strong institutions, partnerships to achieve the goals.

The fourth SDGs, Quality of Education, also known as the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) program, has also been identified as a crucial foundation (UNESCO, 2021; United Nations, 2017). Through education, students should acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote the SDGs. As part of global citizens, this program becomes a matter of concern for countries worldwide (Arslan & Curle, 2021).

Education institutions around the world are considered to be able to carry more attention on inserting those goals into the curricular, extra, or co-curricular in a specific or general level of discipline (Leal Filho, et al., 2019 & Uvalic-Trumbic, S., & Daniel, J., 2016). This is due to the emergence of students acquiring sustainability and becoming part of an impactful society toward sustainable life (Leal Filho, et al., 2019).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is comprised of 38 countries that have established a framework to support the success of the SDGs. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 defines global competence as the multidimensional capacity to address local, international, and intercultural issues (OECD, 2018). Students are encouraged to assume responsibility for addressing issues related to the SDGs (OECD, 2018). It indicates the educational institution should provide the students with an education that supports their students to be relevant to the global context.

On the contrary, the absence of educational institutions to expose their students to SDGs and lack of students' awareness of SDGs are referred to as inadequate. It was observed that learners had difficulty identifying the presence of SDGs issues (Das, Halder, & Bairagya, 2014; Olsson & Gericka, 2016). It was also determined that there is a need for teachers to provide learning themes connected to global challenges in order to raise students' SDGs consciousness (Epstein, 2017).

As an invisible factor, language learning is known to have a crucial role in the development of SDGs (Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, 2017). Language education is associated with the development of the SDGs in terms of sustainable economic growth, communication to achieve peace and justice, and multilingualism (Babaci-Wilhite, Geo-JaJa, & Vuzo, 2014; Harding-Esc & Coleman, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; and UNDP, 2019).

Thus, it is worthwhile to conduct research on the trend of SDGs incorporation in EFL settings. To comprehend the extent of SDGs integration in EFL education, a specific study should be conducted using PRISMA methodology. There has not been a systematic investigation into the integration of SDGs in EFL settings. By conducting this research, the authors hope to provide a summary of where, when, and how the English Language integrated SDGs influences students' learning process.

Research Questions

To understand more about the trend of SDGs theme associated with EFL learning, the writer proposes this systematic review to investigate the most trend of SDGs inserted for the EFL student's learning with the research question:

Research Question: What is the trend of research on the coverage of SDGs in EFL students' learning process?

Method

This part of the study review explains the method used to analyze data. The method is divided into four parts of PRISMA (identification, screening, eligibility, and exclusion). This study analyzes previous studies on SDGs insertion in EFL settings. The database was from Scopus and Google Scholar. Moreover, this cycle is followed by the identification, screening, eligibility, and exclusion phase.

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)

According to this sistematic statement guidelines (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2014), PRISMA is stated as a standard in conducting systematic literature reviews. Liberati, Tetzlaff, and Altman (2009) claim that using PRISMA can lessen the chance of inaccurate reporting and increase the transparency and clarity of reviews. Besides, Sierra-Correa and Cantera Kintz (2015) explain that PRISMA is appropriate for systematic literature reviews in the social sciences because it aids in 1) formulating precise research questions that permit systematic research, 2) identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and 3) attempting to review a sizable database of scientific literature in a predetermined amount of time. This enhances the outcomes of a thorough search for words related to teacher stress and technology adaptation.

Resources

The article cited in this study were collected from Scopus, Taylor and Francis, and Google Scholar. Scopus remains to support the most comprehensive metadata for publication sources. Meanwhile, Taylor and Francis is an international company that publishes academic works in various sectors. Lastly, the data is enriched by the result from Google Scholar article searching. Their databases could range from any technological, social humanities, and other research field issues at any level of analysis.

Systematic searching strategies are divided into three main parts, those are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Those three stages are illustrated in the following flow diagram:
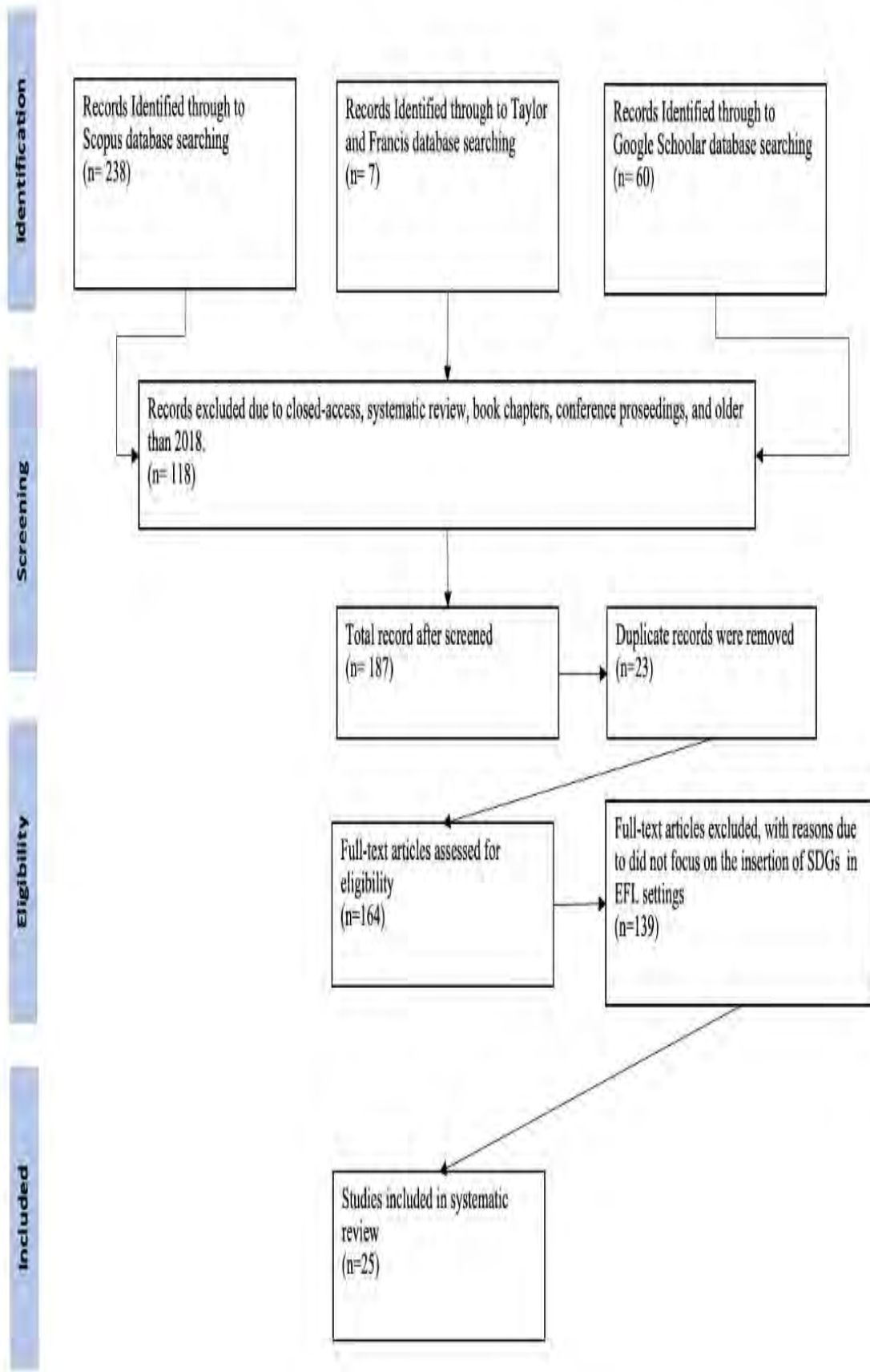
Figure 1: Flow Diagram of Study

Identification

Identification was the first stage of the systemic searching strategies. In this part, the researcher finds studies that are related to the research scope. The researcher applied keywords to find the articles. The keywords used are Sustainability, SDGs, and EFL. The researcher used Boolean "and" and "or" to gain more data. These keywords were then used to search data in Scopus, Taylor and Francis, also Google Scholar. At the beginning of the phase, the researcher found 238 data in the Scopus database. Moreover, through Taylor and Francis, the researchers only found 7 data. Thus, added the result gained from Google Scholar searching, which is 60 data.

Screening

In the early stage, the researcher limited this study by using three characteristics. Those are the year of publication, the type of documents, and the language used in the articles. The selection of the articles was done manually by the researchers using the sorting method. Research on Sustainable Development Goals has been done since 2013. Unfortunately, after sorting the data, no significant research supports this study. Thus, the researcher decided the limitation of the year of publication used in this research ranged from 2018 to 2022. In this study, only articles that were published in journals and done empirically were involved. Those data then turned into reviewing phase to be quality assured.

Eligibility

The next step of the study is called eligibility. There was a total of 164 articles that passed the screening process. In this step, all the elements of each article such as the title, abstracts, and the main discussion and findings of each study were noted and compared to the target of the data. This step of the study causes the elimination of 139 data. The final total of the articles investigated in this study was 25 articles. Those 25 articles were then examined and continued to the next steps.

Exclusion Criteria

The articles used in this study were only the articles that fulfill the criteria. Those included research using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method. The data which were categorized as the book, book chapters, conference proceedings articles, systemic review articles, non-English written publications, and work done before 2018 were all got removed from this study. Researchers should be able to comprehend the scope of the review and verify inclusion judgments. To avoid ambiguity, only qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research articles were included in the journal. Moreover, studies that were not related to the use of SDGs theme in EFL settings were also excluded. The list of final selected articles can be seen in Table 1.

FINDINGS

General Findings of the Articles

The next study step is called eligibility. There was a total of 164 articles that passed the screening process. In this step, all the elements of each article such as the title, abstracts, and the main discussion and findings of each study were noted and compared to the target of the data. This step of the study causes the elimination of 136 data. The final total of the articles investigated in this study was 25 articles. Those 25 articles were then examined and continued to the next steps.

Table 1: Summary of the Selected Articles

No	Authors	Purpose of the Study	Countries	Level	Year
1	S. Arslan & S. Curle	This research analyzed Turkey's English language curriculum and senior high school textbooks' SDGs representation.	Turkey	High School	2021
2	S. Jiao & F. Liang	This study evaluated high school students' English learning motivation structure, results based on gender variations, and motivational effects on English learning achievement as a part of sustainable goals (Quality Education).	China	High School	2022
3	E. Bekteshi & B. Xhaferi	This article introduces Sustainable Development (SD) and its aims to the future educator in the Faculty of Education so they can learn and teach the SDGs. This study attempts to combine the English Language Learning (ELL), ELT, and the SDGs as a form of all-inclusiveness within the Planet, People, and Profit.	Kosovo	University	2020
4	C.T.T. Kwee	By empowering students with subject-related skills and values as global citizens through SDGs, this study's findings are capable of providing educators with insights regarding their teaching goal attainment and job satisfaction.	China	K-12	2022

5	M. Hossain	This project investigates green pedagogy for atmospheric improvement in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms. It seeks practical ways to combine EFL training and green natural phenomena to concurrently increase English language abilities and environmental awareness.	Bangladesh	University	2019
6	A. Syakur, E. Junining, Y. Sabat	Analyzing the educational technology model and innovative learning utilizing cooperative learning type STAD and PBL sustainable learning innovation based on e-learning is the objective of this study.	Indonesia	University	2020
7	S. Nur, I. Anas, & R. Pilu	The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the multimodal discourse of the environmental education imperatives by utilizing the content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) technique.	Indonesia	Others	2022
8	I. G. A. P. E. Putri	This study looks at how much a collaborative digital storytelling project helps a critical approach to environmental education, and it also discusses the problems and advantages of using digital stories to teach about the environment in the EFL context.	Indonesia	University	2018
9	L. Setyowati, S. Karmina, A. H. Sujiatmoko, & N. Ariani	This research examines students' environmental attitudes, writing skills, and opinions on environmental concerns.	Indonesia	University	2022
10	M. Ganji, E. K. Arshadi, S. Mahbubzadeh	This study intends to investigate the knowledge and comprehension of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concept among Iranian English instructors, as well as the influence of demographic factors on their understanding.	Iran	High School, Private Language Institutes, University	2020
11	J. J. Jodoin	The goal of this research is to investigate the efficacy of education for sustainable development (ESD) strategies used in EFL classes in Japanese higher education institutions.	Japan	University	2020
12	M. F. Lin, Y. S. Chen & Y. T. Lai	This study examined how a Facebook initiative improved rural EFL learners' English email literacy as part of SDGs (Number 4).	Taiwan	Secondary & University	2022
13	C. W. Anggraeni & E. Ratnaningsih	This study examines My Digital Poster (MDP) implementation in Communication Studies Study Program English classrooms.	Indonesia	University	2019
14	M. Al-Amin & J. Greenwood	This article investigates secondary English teachers selection, recruitment, training, and professional development as its purpose to achieve SDGs number 4 (Quality Education).	Bangladesh	Secondary	2018
15	S. J. Chung & L. J. Choi	This research explores how a South Korean English language program's unexpected shift to online language education has affected teachers' teaching and evaluation practices, which indirectly connected to the achievement of the SDGs in Education.	South Korea	University	2021
16	Y. Sun, T. H. Wang & L. F. Wang	This study developed two sustainable learning models for the COVID-19 pandemic: GPAM-WATA and Paper-and-Pencil exam.	Taiwan	Junior High School	2021
17	P. López-Zurita, M. V. Amador, & M. C. L. de Oñate	This study examines textbooks' sustainability content and conceptual progression over the years.	Spain	University	2018
18	Bramwell-Lalor, et al.	This study describes on how two-case studies show the implementation of project-based learning which promotes environmental sustainability competencies.	Jamaica & Bulgaria	University & K-12	2018
19	K., Seva, A. Sirait & B. Setiandari	The purpose of this study is to evaluate the students' needs for English for Specific Purposes	Indonesia	University	2022

		(ESP) for students at Parahyangan Catholic University (UNPAR), majoring in Public Administration.			
20	L. Agirreazkuenaga	This study examines how secondary school teachers in the Basque Autonomous Community conduct education for sustainability programs.	Spain	Secondary	2019
21	F. Çelik & Y. Ersanli	The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of incorporating augmented reality into a CLIL setting (related to SDGs). In addition, the opinions of EFL students toward the application of AR are investigated.	Turkey	High School	2022
22	Y. E. Akbana & A. Yavuz	The purpose of this research is to find out what EFL lecturers thought about incorporating global issues (SDGs) into English language instruction.	Turkey	University	2020
23	B. Asta & T. Margarita	The goal of this article is to show how teaching a foreign language can help higher education students learn about sustainable development. In foreign language classes, students can discuss real-world issues related to sustainable development, communicate about problems, and speak about their own feelings and experiences.	Lithuania	University	2018
24	K. Schwanke	The present study explores Education for Sustainable Development by illustrating how sustainability-oriented issues can be integrated into foreign language teaching at school, academic education and research in business economics, and democratic city life in Germany.	Germany	University & Others	2020
25	H. Triyaswati & I. Emaliana	This article examines whether EFL training materials portray gender equally.	Indonesia	Junior High School	2021

Main Findings

The Trend of Research on the Coverage of SDGs in EFL Setting (View from Distribution Based on the Country and Year)

The trends of research on EFL classroom or program integrated with SDGs is shown in Table 2. In the table, Indonesia has the most research on SDGs in EFL with a total of 7 studies. Turkey is the country that embraces the use of SDG themes in EFL classrooms with a total of 3 research. Other research related to SDGs and EFL students' learning context has been done in other countries namely Taiwan (2), Bangladesh (2), China (2), Spain (2), Germany (1), Iran (1), Japan (1), South Korea (1), Jamaica (1), Bulgaria (1), Lithuania (1), and Kosovo (1).

The understanding, attitude, beliefs, point of view, and experiences of teachers, teaching staff, and administrative personnel regarding active participation as global citizens in order to achieve the SDGs could be the factors influencing the quantity of research conducted in a country (Couper, 2017; Wibowo & Liu, 2022). According to the findings of Jaenudin et al. (2023), the teaching and administrative staffs of Indonesia strongly believe that student participation in SDGs integrated learning would benefit them.

Table 2: Distribution based on the Country

Countries	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Indonesia	1	1	1	1	3	7
Turkey	0	0	1	1	1	3
Taiwan	0	0	0	1	1	2
Bangladesh	1	1	0	0	0	2
China	0	0	0	0	2	2
Spain	1	1	0	0	0	2
Germany	0	0	1	0	0	1
Iran	0	0	1	0	0	1
Japan	0	0	1	0	0	1
South Korea	0	0	0	1	0	1
Jamaica						
Bulgaria	1	0	0	0	0	1

Lithuania	1	0	0	0	0	1
Kosovo	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	6	3	6	4	7	25

Sustainable Development Goals associated with EFL classroom trends based on the year of published study can be seen in Figure 2. The year 2022 is when the highest number of research was done. In 2018 and 2020 there is 6 research in each year. The lowest number of research is in 2019 with a total of 3 research and follows by 2021 with 4 research. It suggests that SDG-related research in EFL contexts has recently become a concern. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a substantial increase in this particular field of study. This might have occurred due to current global concerns regarding SDG-related global challenges. As the concept of SDGs became more prevalent, the significance of education on these issues has grown. Due to the wide variety of concerns covered in the SDGs, it is believed that integrating them into the school curriculum becomes one of ways to spread the matters (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019; Okubo, et al., 2021).
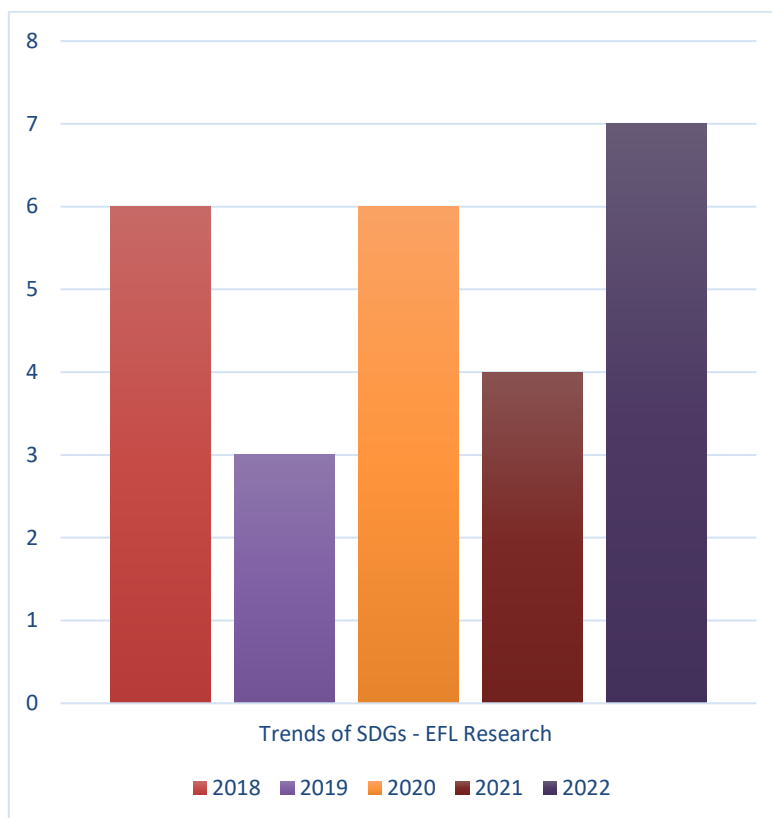

Figure 2: Distribution based on the Year

The Trend of Research on the Coverage of SDGs in EFL Setting (View from Distribution of Samples Across Levels of Education)

The research on SDGs in the EFL context has also been done across levels of education. The 25 articles that have been investigated all ranged from primary to higher education sectors. The authors recall the level of education based on the writer(s) of referred studies indicates in their work. Here, the writer presents the distribution based on the educational level in Figure 3. The diagram shows the particular study was mostly done at university levels with a percentage of 53. Secondly, follows by high school level (13%). It continues by the secondary level and others with 10% score. Meanwhile, junior high school and K-12 with 7%. Chart 1 illustrates the difference in the percentage across the levels of education. The data collected supported previous findings that higher education is where the SDGs are most widely implemented (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Molina, et al., 2023; Zaleniene & Pereira, 2021).
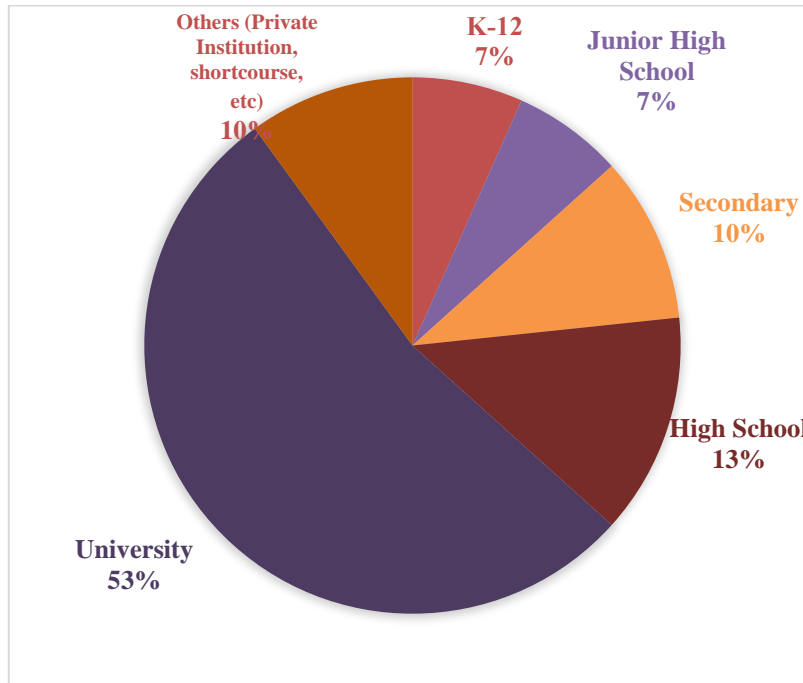
Figure 3: Distribution based on Level of Education

The Trend of Research on the Coverage of SDGs in EFL Setting (View from Its Influence on Students' Learning Process)

To create authentic learning, teachers should consider involving real-life problems in learning, especially in an EFL classroom (Astawa, Artini, & Nitiasih, 2017). United Nations' 2030 agenda could be one of the global problems brought up in the class setting. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) need more comprehensive collaboration, commitment, and effort to achieve a better life for every people, planet, and prosperity (United Nations, 2015).

Integrating SDGs in EFL students' learning has a positive impact on students' learning process. It has been demonstrated that integrating the SDGs into EFL instruction can improve students' language abilities. Hossain (2019) discovered that students who received green pedagogy instruction during the learning process improved their English language abilities. Furthermore, this finding is supported by Setyowati et al. (2022), who discovered that incorporating SDGs issues, particularly environmental issues, as authentic English learning materials could improve students' writing skills.

The integration of SDGs in EFL instruction was also found to enhance students' environmental awareness. According to Hossain (2019), the specific theme about SDGs, particularly environmental issues, could assist students in demonstrating their knowledge of fostering green practices. Then, their knowledge would be reflected in their English writing assignment. Through this process, educators could assess students' environmental understanding and awareness. Putri (2018) found comparable results. Students' environmental consciousness was raised through the use of a digital platform to complete an environmental theme assignment. After the learning process, students were shown to be able to improve their critical environmental pedagogy. According to Nur, Anas, and Pilu (2022), this specific topic should be incorporated into English language teaching activities because of the positive influence it appears to have on increasing students' environmental awareness.

Teachers can assist students in developing a global perspective by exposing students to SDGs issues during English instruction. It has been demonstrated to equip students with the skills necessary to become accountable global citizens. Students would be able to solve global problems facing humanity and assume control and responsibility as members of the global community (Kwee, 2021).

Based on research done in Japan (Jodoin, 2020), it was found that the integration of the education for sustainable development (ESD) program with English in an EFL classroom context has positively influenced students' values, beliefs, and norms. This study applied the principle of content language integrated learning (CLIL). Jodoin also found out that combining both ESD and English language learning could create a more authentic learning environment and gives students a better learning experience.

Moreover, it can be concluded that the trend of associating SDGs with English learning in the EFL context can be seen from different points of view. SDGs can be seen as the focus of the competence that the students should achieve through their English language learning. Instead of just achieving linguistic competence, the students can also expose themselves to the SDGs issue, which has been understood as a vital matter to be known by society nowadays. Therefore, the other role of SDGs can also be seen as the inserted theme of learning, whether it was taken as the theme of educational instrumental such as games, learning material, books, etc. The other is that it was inserted as the topic to be discussed in the classroom discussion. It has proven to influence the students' English learning positively. Besides its significant impact on students' linguistic development, it also helps students to be more relatable towards society nowadays, to be impacted and give good impact to the society by understanding more about

the crucial issue faced nowadays based on what is summarized in the SDGs by United Nations. It also has the potential to enhance EFL students' learning achievement, environmental awareness, global citizen values, self-norms, beliefs, and self-value.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the most recent trend in SDGs association with English as Foreign Language Learning. As a result, this research has closed the gap that previously existed between the limited number of systematic studies on EFL and SDGs. Based on the explanation in the previous chapter, this paper's conclusion can be divided into three points. The first one is the trend of integrating SDGs in the EFL context seen based on the country, year, and the role of SDGs in the learning itself. The first trend is about research timing. Based on the 25 filtered articles gathered by the researcher, 7 of them were done in the Indonesian EFL context. It was followed by Turkey with the amount of 3 research, Taiwan, Bangladesh, China, and Spain with 2 research. Meanwhile, only 1 research was done in each county of Germany, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Jamaica, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Kosovo.

Based on the year of the research, starting with 6 research in 2018. There is a decrease in the research numbers done in the following years. In 2019, there were 3 research done, ended by the highest number of research done in 2022 with 7 research. In 2020 and 2021, the number of research done was 6 and 4 research each year.

The last conclusion is the trend of the involvement of SDGs in the EFL context seen from the role of SDGs itself in each research. Based on the investigation which studied filtered research from 2018 until 2022, the writer categorized the roles of SDGs in English learning as a foreign language based on 2 different roles. The first one is based on the sustainable development competence that needs to be achieved by the students. Instead of just performing better linguistic capabilities, the students could also gain better knowledge and understanding of global issues, as explained in 17 SDGs. The second role found exists in SDGs, and EFL-related research is the content of English learning itself. It can be informed of its involvement as the topic of discussion in the learning material, as the media of the project, etc. Lastly, it was also found that of 25 research, all of them imply a positive effect of involving SDGs in the EFL context towards students' learning achievement, environmental awareness, global citizen values, as well as students' levels of self-norms, beliefs, and self-value. From those explanations on the findings of reviewed research, it can be concluded that the use of SDGs in EFL was becoming a new trend with statistically higher numbers in recent years. It is suggested that more future research with SDGs topic-based could be implemented in English for Foreign Language settings.

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