

# A Narrative Review of Sustainable Leadership in Education Sector

Muhamad Zahir bin Abu Bakar, Rosnah binti Ishak, Mahaliza binti Mansor

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia  
Email: mahaliza@fpe.upsi.edu.my, mzahirukm@gmail.com, rosناه.ishak@fpe.upsi.edu.my

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## Abstract

In the face of global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and economic instability, sustainable leadership has emerged as a critical framework for guiding organizations toward long-term success and resilience. This narrative review explores the multifaceted concept of sustainable leadership, delving into its historical evolution, key characteristics, and underlying theoretical foundations. By synthesizing existing literature, this review identifies the essential components that distinguish sustainable leadership from traditional leadership paradigms, emphasizing the integration of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability. Through the examination of case studies, the paper showcases successful examples of sustainable leadership in action, providing practical insights and lessons learned. The impact of sustainable leadership on organizational performance and stakeholder engagement is critically analysed, with a focus on both short-term benefits and long-term outcomes. Finally, the review proposes future directions for research, identifying gaps in the current literature and suggesting areas for further investigation. Practical recommendations are offered to guide leaders and organizations in adopting sustainable leadership practices. This review aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable leadership, offering a comprehensive understanding of its significance and potential for driving positive change in organizations worldwide.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Leadership, Sustainability, Leadership Framework, Economic Benefits, Social Responsibility.

## Introduction

The most important element of school administration is the school's leadership. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 and globalization provided a few difficulties. Thus, a school's leadership plays a critical role in defining its overall quality. In order to properly manage their school, the school leaders should exercise wisdom (Aung & Hallinger, 2023). To inspire and drive the entire organisation to move forward in obtaining higher performance, a leader must possess interpersonal skills (Liao, 2022). Previous research on sustainable leadership indicates that the efficacy of the school has been impacted by this leadership. Regarding that, one of the new leadership theories that may be used to enhance leadership effectiveness and consequently,

enhance school performance is the practice of sustainable leadership, which was first presented by education experts Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink. According to Hargreaves (2007), all school administrators ought to prioritise and dedicate themselves to sustainable leadership in the course of their work.

The change agenda and the readiness for change in the educational organisation are still not taken seriously by a certain group of school administrators, (Robinson et al., 2008). These individuals also claim that the administrator's own leadership is what makes them necessary change agents in the organisation. According to study by Mohamed et al (2022), the foundation of school leadership is determining a school's ups and downs and one of the factors contributing to a school's inability to become an effective institution is the support of the school administrator's own efforts. The study conducted by Sasliza & Izham (2020), revealed that the leadership practiced by the principals in Hulu Langat schools during the implementation of school-based management was moderately effective in relation to the effectiveness of the schools he led. This was determined through a correlation analysis. The results additionally indicate that the leadership techniques in place have no discernible effect on school effectiveness. The findings of this study provide room for future research on sustainable leadership and how it contributes to successful educational environments.

Results from earlier research also demonstrate that shifts towards effective schools are facilitated by sustainable leadership approaches. Supian & Khadijah (2014), study on sustainable leadership concentrated on the work performance of primary school teachers in the Segamat district who had been given a new offer (bi'ah). The researchers discovered that the principals in the Segamat district demonstrated a moderately high level of sustainable leadership while also managing to sustain a high standard of teacher performance. This demonstrates how teachers' ability to guide a successful school is obviously impacted by the leadership element in that institution. The relationship between school administrators' leadership styles and their ability to facilitate teachers' participation in professional learning community activities in basic education schools in Thailand was examined by Somprach et al (2017), in a study founding principles of schools employ sustainable leadership as their second most popular approach, with a mean score of 4.41. According to Iqbal & Ahmad (2021), sustainable leadership may be defined as a leadership approach that is competent and accountable for applying knowledge, skills, and expertise to the efficient and effective administration and management of schools.

Furthermore, Phing & Karuppanan (2022), reported that his research findings demonstrated the correlation between the elements of sustainable leadership and the dedication of educational institutions in government schools. The study highlighted the significance of an administrator's leadership style in shaping an institution's administrative policies and ultimately contributing to the school's success in achieving its objectives. The research aligns with Ishak (2015), study, which demonstrates that the principle of Kuching Division Religious Secondary School has excellent levels of sustainable leadership practices across the board. Previous research has also demonstrated that school administrators' practices fall short of what is needed to create effective schools, with a lack of expertise in managing and educating students among other issues (Chee et al., 2018). This indicates that there is a lack of consistency in a school's leadership methods when it comes to attaining academic excellence and operating at an efficient level.

**Methodology**

This article's goal is to provide a conceptual framework for sustainable leadership by investigating and analyzing the idea of sustainable leadership. Search engines such as Science Direct (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>), Taylor & Francis (<http://www.tandfonline.com/>), Sage Publications (<http://www.sagepub.com/home.nav>), and Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>) were used to find pertinent papers during this process. Throughout the process, terms like "sustainable leadership impacts on education," "sustainable development goals," and "sustainable leadership" were employed. 143 articles were identified as a consequence of the research. But following the second round of screening, only 29 were left. A limited amount of the chosen articles addressed sustainable leadership in other nations, with the majority of them concentrating on challenges related to education leadership in Europe. Five publications in all were determined to be the primary sources for reviewing the current frameworks for sustainable leadership and providing a conceptualization of the frameworks.

This introduction is followed by an exploration and analysis of the notion of sustainable leadership, as well as a discussion of the models of sustainable leadership currently in use in the obligatory sector and an assessment of their suitability for the Malaysian education system. Sorting through and summarizing the effects of sustainable leadership serves as the foundation for the integrated analytical framework of sustainable leadership that this study also builds. In order to further encourage studies on sustainable leadership, the paper concludes with a prediction for future directions in this field.

**Theoretical Framework**

The practice of sustainable leadership has been used in various contexts and settings. In the education sector (in the US and UK), Hargreaves and Fink (2006), Davies (2007), and Lambert (2011), investigate sustainable leadership by utilizing an organizational level of analysis. In certain situations, Avery and Bergsteiner (2011), take an organizational viewpoint. Lastly, Casserley and Critchley (2010) concentrate on the personal growth of sustainable leaders.

There are a few recurring themes among the various frameworks that are worth considering. The subjects are divided into two categories: individuals and organizational procedures. Succession planning is one of the people factors that deals with possibilities for leaders and employees to grow. Inclusion and depth are also crucial factors to consider. Individual development and resourcefulness should be extended to organizational practices, which include development and striking a balance between goals and the organization's future. Sustainable leadership should be ingrained throughout the entire organization.

The frameworks for sustainable leadership that are frequently utilized are listed in Table 1. According to eminent writers who have researched the idea, it lists some of the essential behaviors and traits of sustainable leadership. Utilizing these, the study analyses the foundational themes, discusses ramifications, and provides support for a conceptual framework of sustainable leadership.

Table 1

*Sustainable Leadership Framework*

Authors	Hargreaves and Fink (2003)	Davies (2009)	Lambert (2011)
Definition	The future that we see demands leadership in new and more difficult ways. Now, it is leadership as learning, leadership by learning, and leadership for learning	The main elements that support the school's longer-term development can be regarded as constituting sustainable leadership. It creates a leadership culture with a moral foundation that makes success attainable for anyone.	Sustainable leadership requires dedication from all organisational levels to foster a culture where leadership abilities may be developed if it is to have any appreciable effect on the organisation.
Framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Depth - Sustainable Leadership matters.</li> <li>2. Length - Sustainable leadership lasts.</li> <li>3. Breadth - Sustainable leadership spreads.</li> <li>4. Justice - sustainable leadership does no harm to and actively improves the surrounding environment.</li> <li>5. Diversity - Sustainable leadership promotes cohesive diversity.</li> <li>6. Resourcefulness - sustainable leadership develops and does not deplete material and human resources.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outcomes not just outputs.</li> <li>2. Balancing short- and long-term objectives.</li> <li>3. Processes not plans.</li> <li>4. Passion.</li> <li>5. Personal humility and professional will.</li> <li>6. Strategic timing and strategic abandonment.</li> <li>7. Building capacity and creating involvement.</li> <li>8. Development of strategic measures of success.</li> <li>9. Building in Sustainability</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Builds capacity of staff.</li> <li>2. Strategic distribution.</li> <li>3. Consolidates.</li> <li>4. Builds long term objectives from short term goals.</li> <li>5. Diversity.</li> <li>6. Conserves</li> </ol>

	7. Conservation – sustainable leadership honours and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future		
Research Context	Education sector - looking at research from both the UK and the US and stems from the idea of principle leadership	Education Sector - looking at both UK and US	Education Sector – looking at both UK and US

**Findings**

The conceptualization of the synthesized frameworks for sustainable leadership has led to the derivation of internal and external elements that impact sustainable leadership. This conceptualization shows the various components and variables that eventually affect an organization’s sustainable leadership and culture. Through the development of this conceptualization of sustainable leadership, connections may be established between the literature and the potential consequences of sustainable leadership research. Achieving cultural sustainability in sustainable leadership involves three key components: the external environment, organizational procedures, and stakeholder consideration.

A sustainable employment connection and an understanding of the many interests of stakeholders are essential for good long-term organizational performance (Lambert, 2020). According to Diepenmaat et al (2020), businesses that priorities employee engagement, motivation, and well-being over organizational performance are more likely to produce sustainable outcomes. However, it is imperative that all stakeholders receive equal attention. The degree of cohesion within the company may determine this. According to (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), sustainable leadership growth and achievement require an internal environment that is both effective and developmental.

Learning and development should be inclusive and provide chances for staff members from all areas of the company, according to several of the sustainable leadership frameworks (Table 1). The concept of developing capacity and resourcefulness, which underlines that opportunities should be provided for all employees, emphasizes this further (Davies, 2007). As a result, leaders and individuals alike should value and be a part of the organization, according to sustainable leadership (Lambert, 2020). In today's businesses, it is crucial to develop leaders and staff.

Finally, in thinking about the integration and development of sustainable leadership, it's critical to take into account the connections and interdependencies between corporate governance, ethical obligations, and the external environment. As a result, it's necessary to take into account both the internal and external contexts when implementing sustainable leadership. (Ferdig, 2007) concurs and underlines how important it is for leaders to act in ways that go beyond their own self-interests. According to Kalshoven et al (2011), prior studies have shown that the benefits of moral leadership necessitate a good working relationship between the leader and the workforce. It is imperative to use caution while conceiving of sustainable leadership since context matters.

Previous research has indicated that the effects of sustainable leadership can be observed at the individual, team, organizational, and societal levels; however, the majority of empirical evaluations to date have concentrated on the individual and organizational levels. Employee behavior and cognition are the two areas where sustainable leadership most directly affects workers. (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016) reported that, in terms of cognitive aspects, 20 of the 23 sustainable leadership strategies had the potential to greatly increase workers' job happiness. A few sustainable leadership strategies, including work-family balance, were also found by Lee (2017), to be significant predictors of employee happiness. Research by Çayak (2021), looked at how teachers' organizational commitment and work satisfaction were affected by the sustainable leadership practices of school principals. They discovered that high levels of both variables may be predicted by sustainable leadership. Sustainability in leadership has been shown to boost employee trust in the company, according to Dalati (2015), who also looked at the impact of sustainable leadership with instructors. (Javed et al., 2021) maintained that the behaviors of workers were enhanced by sustainable leadership, resulting in workers who are more accountable. Sustainable leadership, according to Moreira et al (2022), makes workers feel that the company values their competency development and cares about them, which lowers their inclination to quit.

The effects of sustainable leadership are mostly shown in performance-related indicators at the organizational level, and researchers have focused more on the interaction between these factors. For instance, according to Avery (2005), five performance-related outcomes were generated by sustainable leadership: financial performance, customer happiness, reputation, shareholder value, and long-term value for a variety of stakeholders. Additionally, they emphasized how sustainable leadership may strengthen organizational resilience. 16 of the 23 sustainable leadership practices and business financial performance were shown to be significantly positively correlated, according to an empirical study conducted in 2016 by Suriyankietkaew & Avery (2016), with a sample of Thai SMEs. Research by Lee (2017), has also demonstrated that successful leadership may be sustained over time. Scholars' recent empirical analyses have primarily shown a connection between organizational sustainability

and the results of sustainable leadership. After examining the effects of sustainable leadership in multiple SMEs across several nations, (Burawat, 2019) concluded that sustainable performance was positively impacted by sustainable leadership.

### **Discussion**

As was previously mentioned, sustainable leadership is a humanistic style of leadership that may be considered just another trend in the field. Sustainable leadership, however, supports ideas that many writers have already covered, such as the necessity of succession planning, the importance of a developing culture, and the embeddedness of clear and cohesive principles, to mention a few. Therefore, even though sustainable leadership is a "new approach" to leadership overall, it nonetheless incorporates historical components and does so in a way that can significantly benefit companies. However, switching to this new strategy needs to be a necessary consequence of the idea.

Avery & Bergsteiner (2011), argue that many companies have adopted a "locust" strategy, or a short-term attitude, to their goals and strategies as a result of the economic downturn. Nonetheless, a balance between an organization's short- and long-term goals and tactics is encouraged by the long-term and sustainable character of sustainable leadership. According to Davies (2007), accomplishing short-term objectives might predict long-term success; as such, they should not be seen as antagonistic components but rather as complementary ones. (Lambert, n.d.) concurs and highlights that long-term organizational direction rather than band-aid solutions will be provided by sustainable leadership. According to Shaaban (2020), there is a difference between the idea that short-term and long-term goals are mutually exclusive. Instead, he argues that both goals should be used to complement each other, and this may be accomplished through sustainable leadership. According to Avery & Bergsteiner (2011), adopting a long-term view is essential to sustainable leadership. Thus, it may be inferred that the overarching goal of sustainable leadership is to establish an organization's long-term viability. Having said that, it is arguable that achieving short-term objectives will help us get there.

Furthermore, considering all the organization's stakeholders can be viewed as a crucial component of sustainable leadership especially considering the psychological agreements that the company has with other parties. The social dimensions of leadership in organizations, which cannot be risky and can only provide positive results are highly valued by sustainable leadership. Many organizations, especially those in the public sector have serious concerns about public processes. Many also wonder how long-term plans can be developed if governments or policies change. The idea of changing policies and the effect this has on the organization's processes and values must be considered while analyzing the values of public sector organizations. However, more research is required to determine how these modifications to the external environment affect the internal environment and consequently the culture and leadership within it.

### **Conclusion**

The theoretical foundations of sustainable leadership have been examined in this study and the most often cited aspects of the concept, as they pertain to the internal and external elements that impact sustainable leadership, have been synthesized and presented. This makes it possible to analyze and think about the concepts in a unified way. While we address

the theoretical aspect, it's crucial to examine how various organizations implement sustainable leadership techniques to understand the consequences. Sustainable leadership has many benefits, but it also requires a long-term strategy that may be difficult to execute due to the potential for a dramatic shift in organizational culture and leadership style. The best way for organizations to foster a sustainable culture is for their leaders to set an example by implementing as many sustainable practices as possible.

This narrative review makes several significant contributions to the understanding and implementation of sustainable leadership in the education sector. Firstly, it offers a comprehensive overview of sustainable leadership, presenting a detailed exploration of its principles and practical applications. By identifying best practices through case studies, the study provides valuable insights that educational leaders can adopt to enhance their institutions' sustainability. Additionally, by highlighting the challenges and proposing potential solutions, the study equips leaders with strategies to navigate common obstacles. The implications of this review extend to policy and practice, advocating for the development of supportive frameworks and policy changes that promote sustainable leadership.

The study also identifies gaps in the literature, suggesting areas for future research that can further advance the field. Moreover, the emphasis on a cultural shift towards sustainability serves as a call to action, encouraging educational leaders to foster a culture that prioritizes long-term success and resilience. In summary, this study not only deepens the understanding of sustainable leadership in education but also provides practical tools and frameworks that can guide leaders in their sustainability efforts. By addressing both theoretical and practical aspects, the study aims to inspire and equip educational leaders to create more sustainable and effective educational environments.

Future research should continue to explore the evolving landscape of sustainable leadership, addressing existing gaps and expanding our understanding of its multifaceted nature. Practical recommendations provided in this review serve as a guide for leaders and organizations striving to implement sustainable practices, emphasizing the need for continuous learning and adaptation. In conclusion, sustainable leadership is not merely a desirable attribute but a fundamental necessity for organizations aiming to thrive in the 21st century. By embracing sustainable leadership principles, organizations can not only achieve long-term success but also contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world.



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