

# Sustainable Living Practices: An Investigation on College Students

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the sustainable living practices of college students, with a particular focus on the environmental, social, and economic aspects of their habits. The Sustainable Habits Scale was used to survey a random sample of two hundred students who were in their final year of arts at Tezpur, Assam. The survey was grounded in a positivist paradigm. The findings indicate that there is a mostly favourable trend in environmentally friendly behaviours, with no participants reporting significantly low sustainable habits. The majority of the pupils exhibited a high degree of sustainable practices. Furthermore, significant levels of sustainable behaviours were noted in both the environmental and social aspects. It became clear that education was a significant factor, highlighting the significance of educational institutions of higher learning in the process of shaping sustainable behaviours. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations for broader sustainability-related initiatives include transdisciplinary sustainability education, eco-friendly campus projects, community participation, awareness programmes, and collaborations.

**Keywords:** Sustainable living practices, college students, sustainability, environmental, social, economic.

## Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant rise in worldwide consciousness and dedication towards sustainable development. This is probably due to concerns regarding the impact of social, economic, and environmental changes, as well as the growing population around the world (Alsaati, El-Nakla, and El-Nakla, 2020). At its 1992 meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (ECO-92) embraced the concept of sustainable development as its paramount issue. Recognising sustainable development as the most pressing issue of our day, this summit served as a global benchmark. Further, it also marked the first attempt to create strategies and action plans in this field on a global scale. In a broad sense, "sustainability" describes actions and endeavours taken to satisfy human needs. Moreover, the United Nations (2015) introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means of demonstrating global dedication to tackling pressing global

challenges. The SDGs contain a diverse array of interrelated objectives that go beyond environmental concerns and cover economic and social aspects. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to promote sustainable living practices in several facets of everyday existence.

Sustainable living practices have arisen as a necessity for limiting the impact that human activities have on the earth in light of the growing number of environmental challenges that have been brought to light. The global call for sustainability covers a wide range of areas of day-to-day life, including matters such as the management of waste and energy consumption, as well as lifestyle choices and consumer behaviour. Sustainable living practice relates to economic development and the use of environmentally friendly products, as well as the judicious use of natural resources. Sustainable development is based on three principle considerations : environmental preservation, economic growth, and cultural and social equity (Purvis, Mao, and Robinson, 2019). The fundamental cognitive processes by which people arrange their lives are the building blocks of their habits and ways of living. There is an urgent need to transition towards livelihoods that align with and adapt to the health needs of both individuals and the environment. This is because we acknowledge the significant impact that daily actions have on both environmental change and human health (Capon, 2014). Adopting sustainable living practices is the key to rejuvenating our world. We can lessen our impact on the environment, slow the rate of climate change, and protect natural resources by making ecologically responsible decisions. The goal of a sustainable lifestyle is to reduce human interference with existing patterns of behaviour and to promote restraint in the consumption of natural resources. Sustainable practices in life can be fostered through environmentally conscious decision-making (Joseph and Joseph, 2019).

Through the cultivation of consciousness, the instillation of values, and equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to a sustainable future, education plays a crucial role in the promotion of sustainable living practices. The process of education acts as a catalyst for the creation of a society that values sustainable living practices and actively pursues them. Educational institutions contribute to the development of environmentally conscious persons who can meet the complex challenges of the 21st century by incorporating sustainability into educational frameworks. Attaining sustainable development necessitates the elevation of consciousness, principles, and habits. Educational institutions have a vital role in moulding human intelligence and behaviour. Higher education functions as a foundation for tackling global issues (Alsaati, El-Nakla, and El-Nakla, 2020). Therefore, to uphold the integrity of the environment and adhere to sustainability standards, it is important that undergraduates must be educated and knowledgeable about sustainability practices. Teachers need to ensure that pupils comprehend the link between resource and environmental sustainability in addition to implementing regulations that will further encourage sustainable behaviour (Wallis and Laurenson, 2004).

### **Literature Review**

According to Spaargaren& Van Vliet (2000), the term "sustainable living practice" describes how sustainability is put into practice in real-world situations, with an emphasis on minimising adverse impacts on the environment and promoting environmental sensitivity(as cited in Yurt and Deniz, 2021).Advocates of sustainable living contend that this approach can help improve both global and local sustainable development strategies, which will lead to new goals and a clear path to a sustainable future (Yurt and Deniz, 2021). They strive to lead their lives in a manner that aligns with sustainability, maintaining a harmonious and considerate connection between humans and the Earth's ecosystems (Mitra & Sen, 2016). The increasing global population is putting pressure on natural resources, which requires careful and wise usage to sustain the world. A proactive and informed practice of sustainable living is vital, as human acts characterised by selfishness are a contributing factor to both resource depletion and climate change (Joseph & Joseph, 2019).Sustainable living goes beyond what individuals may do and involves what we can do as a community (Vale & Vale, 2008). It involves the collaboration of communities, institutions, and societies to reduce environmental effects, advocate for environmentally friendly behaviours, and enhance the overall welfare of the planet. Saim, Sen, & Saha (2021) contended that sustainable living is achieved by the synergistic use of efficient infrastructure and individual

choices focused on diminishing the utilisation of natural resources, emissions, waste, and pollution. Rethinking our everyday activities, social relationships, sharing habits and educational efforts are all part of this drive to encourage environmentally responsible and sustainable living.

### Significance of the study

Sustainable living is closely interconnected with the resolution of global issues such as climate change, depletion of resources, and environmental deterioration. A complex interplay of environmental, social, and economic factors constitutes sustainable living practices. This research is in line with global sustainability goals, especially those stated in UN frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Students' values and behaviours are significantly shaped by colleges and universities. Sustainable practices can be greatly influenced by college students, who are positioned to become leaders and decision-makers in the future. An important step towards raising environmental consciousness and educating the public is to study how college students live sustainably. Why should we care about college students' sustainable living actions? Because we have a pressing need to find solutions to present-day problems, the power of education to bring about positive change, the interrelatedness of sustainability issues, and the crucial role that young people will play in creating a more sustainable future.

### Objectives

1. To investigate the overall sustainable habits of college students.
2. To analyse the dimension-oriented sustainable habits of college students, focusing on Environmental, Social, and Economic aspects.

### Methodology

This study adopts a positivist paradigm, which prioritises an objective and empirical approach to understand sustainable living practices among college students. A non-experimental quantitative approach is employed to collect numerical data on sustainable living practices. The use of descriptive research is suitable for this study since it enables a comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon being studied. A random sample of 200 college students from the final year of the Arts discipline in Tezpur, Sonitpur District, Assam, is selected. The study employs a simple random sampling technique called probabilistic sampling, which guarantees that every individual in the population has an equal probability of being selected for the study. To gather primary data, the researchers utilised the Sustainable Habits Scale (SHS-DSKL) developed by Dr. Sona Dixit and Laxmi Khandelwal.

### Results

**Analysis of Objective No. 1:** *To investigate the overall sustainable habits of college students*

Table1: Level of sustainable habits of college students

Level of sustainable habits	No. of sample	Percentage
<b>Extremely High</b>	29	15%
<b>High</b>	61	31%
<b>Above Average</b>	47	24%
<b>Average/Moderate</b>	39	20%
<b>Below Average</b>	19	10%
<b>Low</b>	5	3%
<b>Extremely Low</b>	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	200	100%

The data shown in Table 1 indicates that a significant proportion of the sample, that is 15%, demonstrated an extremely high level of sustainable habits. A further 31% were classified in the high category, indicating a commendable commitment to sustainable practices. 24% of the participants belonged to the above-average group, indicating a substantial proportion of individuals who actively practiced environmentally sensitive behaviours. In addition, 20% of the sample exhibited a moderate or average level of sustainable habits. 10% of the group falls into the below-average category, while only 3% had low sustainable habits. Notably, none of the participants indicated having an extremely low level of sustainable habits, suggesting an overall positive trend in environmentally friendly behaviours among college students.

**Analysis of Objective No. 2:** *To analyse the dimension-oriented sustainable habits of college students, focusing on Environmental, Social, and Economic aspects.*

Table 2: Level of sustainable habits of college students based on dimension-wise

Level of sustainable habits	Dimensions					
	Environmental		Social		Economic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Extremely High</b>	34	17%	23	12%	19	10%
<b>High</b>	77	<b>39%</b>	69	<b>35%</b>	34	17%
<b>Above Average</b>	47	24%	38	19%	45	23%
<b>Average/Moderate</b>	29	15%	31	16%	66	<b>33%</b>
<b>Below Average</b>	13	7%	25	13%	22	11%
<b>Low</b>	0	0%	14	7%	14	7%
<b>Extremely Low</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	200	100%	200	100%	200	100%

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of college students' sustainable practices across three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. A noteworthy finding indicates that 39% of students show a high level of sustainable practices in the Environmental dimension and 35% in the Social dimension. Meanwhile, 33% of students exhibit a moderate level of sustainable practices in the Economic dimension.

## Discussion

Gaining insight into students' knowledge and attitudes is crucial for fostering a sustainable future, given the significant influence that higher education institutions have on moulding future leaders (Holison, 2023). This survey revealed that majority of the students possess high level of sustainable habits and none of the participants reported having a very low level of sustainable habits, indicating a generally favorable trend in college students' environmentally friendly behavior. This result is consistent with the studies of Holison (2023); Dimitrova, Vaishar, and Šťastná (2021). Similar to this, Mitra& Sen (2016) found that most secondary students have a basic awareness of sustainable lifestyles and development strategies based on their study on awareness and attitude. Moreover, students showed a high level of sustainable practices in the Environmental dimension and in the Social dimension. Rødnes and Dolonen (2023) reveals that students primarily suggested individual actions, such as recycling and reducing water, food, and clothing consumption as their contributions to environmental aspects of sustainable development, emphasising students' understanding of eco-friendly behaviours. Nevertheless, Alsaati, El-Nakla, and El-Nakla (2020) discovered that participants exhibited a limited level of awareness regarding sustainability, particularly in recognising commonly utilised recycled or renewable materials in their daily lives. Joseph & Joseph's (2019) study findings indicate that a significant proportion of student teachers do not adhere to the principles of sustainable living.

## Conclusion

The present study indicates that there is an overall increase in college students' environmentally friendly behaviour, as none of the participants reported having extremely low levels of sustainable practices. Based on this research, most students possess knowledge about the core principles of sustainable development strategies and lifestyles. Education plays a vital role in fostering global awareness and advancing sustainable development by encouraging the adoption of sustainable living practices. Education can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and behavioural modifications required to mitigate or decrease greenhouse gas emissions by promoting sustainable consumption patterns in lifestyles, livelihoods, economies, and social structures. Through proper education, individuals have the potential to assume a prominent position in reshaping their way of life to effectively tackle the current sustainability challenges faced by humanity.

## Recommendation

- a) Integrate multidisciplinary sustainability education curriculum throughout several academic fields in colleges. Sustainability courses and seminars that specifically address the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability can significantly increase students' understanding and commitment to this cause.
- b) Implement and advocate for eco-friendly sustainable practices on the college campus, including recycling programmes, energy-efficient techniques, and the creation of green spaces. Such initiatives foster a sustainable environment and promote students' adoption of similar behaviours in their daily lives.
- c) To solve the issues of local sustainability, it is important to facilitate community service and engagement activities. Students develop a sense of responsibility and are motivated to actively participate in positive change when their classroom learning is connected to real-world sustainability challenges.
- d) Initiate awareness programmes that emphasise the environmental, social, and economic consequences of adopting a sustainable way of life. Use communication platforms, such as social media, posters, and seminars, to effectively engage a wide range of individuals and cultivate a sustainable mindset.
- e) For students to have the opportunity to participate in larger sustainability initiatives outside of college, form collaborations with local businesses, NGOs, and sustainability networks. Collaborative efforts can magnify the influence of sustainable practices.

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