

# Chapter 1

# Catalysing Sustainability in Higher Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter serves as an introduction to the book. It discusses the integration of sustainability in higher education, highlighting initiatives, historical milestones, and the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for a sustainable future. The chapter frames seven actionable aspects and discusses the challenges and opportunities for integrating sustainability in higher education. Digital leadership, artificial intelligence, STEAM education, lifelong and life-wide learning, and values-based education are further emphasised as areas of opportunities for catalysing sustainability in higher education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine a student stepping on a university campus in the year 2026. The university has made a transformative shift towards sustainability, integrating green practices across all aspects of campus life. The following scenario unfolds as the student observes and embraces the notion of sustainability.

*My name is Iman and today marks the beginning of my journey at YYY University, a university known for its commitment to sustainability. As I step onto the campus for the first time, I'm immediately struck by the lush greenery and innovative architecture that blends seamlessly with nature. The excitement in the air is palpable as I join my fellow new students for the orientation session. In the auditorium, we're greeted by the vice chancellor, who passionately speaks about our collective mission to create a sustainable future. We're introduced to the various sustainability initiatives on campus. I learn that the buildings are designed with solar panels, green roofs, and energy-efficient systems. The rainwater harvesting systems intrigue me, providing water for irrigation and toilets, embodying the university's eco-friendly ethos. The commitment to a zero-waste policy is evident everywhere. Recycling stations are abundant, composting facilities are available, and single-use plastics are nowhere to be seen. The electric shuttle buses and bike-sharing programs catch my eye. I also notice that many parking lots have been converted into community gardens, adding to the campus's green appeal.*

*Every course I take will integrate sustainability principles. I'm excited to see how this will shape my education, from engineering classes to arts and humanities, all focusing on assuring planet health and environmental stewardship. We hear about projects that extend beyond the campus, where students collaborate with local communities to address environmental and societal challenges. This community involvement is something I'm eager to be part of.*

*As the orientation session wraps up, I feel a sense of purpose and inspiration. I'm ready to contribute to this sustainable future, knowing that my actions and education here will make a difference.*

The scenario from the perspective of a student provides a glimpse of a campus in the very near future, soon enough for those who are still oblivious and hesitant to instigate the right move immediately. This chapter seeks to discuss sustainability in the context of higher education and to put in place the various themes explicated in the forthcoming chapters. It will encapsulate the definition of sustainability in higher education, the pertinent focus areas and the looming challenges.

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