Developing an ESP Syllabus to Promote Sustainable Development Goals: A Delphi Study

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Abstract

The syllabus design for ESP should account for specific learners' and industry needs regarding language skills, aspects and functions. Furthermore, the process should consider the globally trending challenges to prepare learners for their prospective jobs. In this regard, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are comprehensive agenda that shapes the world's future in different interconnected domains. Thus, incorporating them in ESP syllabi can promote knowledge about Sustainable Development (SD) as suggested by UN SDG 4 on Quality Education and contribute to the achievement of other goals, such as UN SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth. Subsequently, the present study adopts the Delphi technique to explore 23 multinational and multidisciplinary experts on the ways to develop a needs-analysis-based tourism ESP syllabus that promotes the UN SDGs and enables learners to effectively communicate them in their future careers. The results show that although the current syllabus is aligned with target learners' needs and the specified goals, it lacks appropriate alignment with UN SDGs and sustainable tourism. The experts recommend updating learning goals and outcomes to align the syllabus with the UN SDGS and enrich it with more SD-related content. The study's implications highlight the need for further research on adapting ESP syllabi across disciplines to address globally trending issues and initiatives outlined in the UN SDG framework.

Keywords: Decent Work; Education for Sustainability; Sustainability, UN SDGs, UN SDG 4, UN SDG 8, Quality Education

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an emerging agenda that was launched on 25 September 2015 and was adopted by the UN General Assembly as a framework for steering humanity to a sustainable path that ensures a peaceful, prosperous, and equitable way of life for all people on earth, both in the present and future (UNESCO, 2017). The fourth of these goals is (Quality Education) as it is believed that education is an important foundation for Sustainable Development (SD) (Arslan & Curle, 2021). Accordingly, the approach of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is established to equip people with knowledge, skills, and values that enable them to "take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7). These aims can be achieved by adopting policies "promoting teaching and curriculum development for SD by aligning curricula with SDGs, facilitating experiential learning, and offering capacity-building opportunities for educators" (United Nations, 2024). Researchers believe that language education can contribute to these aspects as it is strongly connected to socio-cultural issues related to human rights, peace and SD (Matz & Römhild, 2024). This, in itself, reveals the scope and relevance of this futuristic sustainability project.

In this strand, language education plays a significant role in SD (Rada, 2022) by first enhancing students' skills to prepare them for decent jobs as stated by the UN SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and second equipping them with appropriate competencies that enable them to communicate SD aspects and thus promote SDGs on different premises (Römhild, Siepmann, & Bruns, 2023). Accordingly, integrating SD contours in English language education supports UN SDGs particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) (Yu, Guo, & Fu, 2024) and it necessarily supports other goals too.

Since the English language is a lingua franca that is "used in global discourses on human and children's rights, peace, and sustainable development" (Matz & Römhild, 2024, p. 1), it inevitably plays a key role not only for EFL students/learners but also for all learners who attend English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in other disciplines as well. Accordingly, there is a high need to develop ESP courses with an English language education that fosters not only students' academic and linguistic skills but also extends to address the concepts of SD that align with students' prospective future jobs and therefore teaches both English language skills and content knowledge related to SD (Arslan & Curle, 2024). Subsequently, language textbooks should "offer some inputs to the intercultural learning and citizenship education of students while at the same time helping them develop their communicative skills and language awareness" (Risager, 2020, p.

1). Among these ESP courses, tourism courses are considered valuable instances of how the English language can be used both to develop students' communicative skills and to promote sustainable tourism as mentioned verbatim in the UN SDG 8.

There is a belief that sustainable tourism entails communicative strategies that are different from mainstream tourism (Lazzeretti, 2020). The reason for this is that tourism is strongly connected to many SDG goals including Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Responsible Consumption (SDG 12) and Climate Action (SDG 13). Further, it is based initially on Quality Education (SDG 4). Subsequently, English for Tourism syllabi need to be aligned with communicative skills and content knowledge that enable prospective tourism personnel to promote the SD agenda. Linguistic aspects can effectively support sustainability education through different tasks that can better be applied in tourism settings. This is mainly because rich vocabulary and grammar for example can equip tourism workers with the necessary communication skills to promote SDGs and thus language serves as an essential tool for fostering understanding and promoting action on sustainability issues within the tourism sector. This fact aligns with the emergent trend in research that investigates the SDGs' correlation with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning (Astawa, Santosa, Artini, & Nitiasih, 2024). This research follows the observation that language is significant in promoting SDGs, but its role does not receive the attention that is proportionate to its significance (Rada, 2022). Accordingly, this research aims to contribute to filling this gap by investigating the role of ESP syllabi in promoting the UN SDGs as suggested by many previous studies such as Arslan and Curle (2021); Rada (2022); Römhild et al. (2023); and Yu et al. (2024). The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into the design of effective ESP curricula that support the broader sustainable development agenda.

1.1 ESP Syllabus Design

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), three key factors led to the emergence of the ESP approach. Firstly, the global growth in scientific, technical, and economic activities necessitated an international language, which happened to be English with different varieties for different fields. Secondly, the shift in linguistics towards functional theories revealed how language usage varies across different workplaces. This made teaching of language tailored to specific contexts necessary. Thirdly, the learner-centred approach in educational psychology suggested that designing English courses relevant to learners' needs and interests would enhance their motivation and learning.

Anthony (2018) defines ESP as an approach that targets learners' academic and professional needs, emphasizes essential language skills, and utilizes general and specialization-related materials to support learners in meeting their specific requirements. Similarly, Mohammad and Halim (2024) define ESP as a language teaching approach that is specifically tailored to the needs of particular disciplines and professions and fulfils the requirements of the scientific community and the English language users within specific vocations. Thus, the main purpose of the approach, which is considered a discipline by some researchers, has been "that of fulfilling the specific needs of target learners to satisfy either their professional or vocational demands" (Ramirez, 2015, p. 380). These definitions entail that ESP is an approach that serves both learners and the broader community. By analysing and addressing the specific language and communication requirements of the learners, the ESP syllabus is designed to fit directly into their individual needs. Simultaneously, this learner-focused approach also aligns with the demands and expectations of the relevant disciplines, professions or scientific communities.

Accordingly, the foundation of an effective ESP syllabus lies in addressing three key elements: the content, the skills, and the teaching methods (Jordan, 1997). The inclusion of these components in the ESP syllabus is determined based on a careful consideration of the specific needs and requirements of the learners and the specialization. This suggests that the core principle of ESP is to thoroughly analyze the learners' needs and subsequently design English language courses that cater directly to those identified needs (Mohamed & Halim, 2024). By understanding the learners' specific language requirements, learning preferences, and the contextual factors that shape their educational needs, the ESP syllabi can be tailored to align with the target audience's goals and objectives.

The integration of sustainability into the ESP syllabus design is based on these key theoretical principles that emphasize relevance, learner-centeredness, and contextualization. Effective ESP syllabus design prioritizes the specific needs of learners and the professional contexts in which they will operate, making it imperative to incorporate sustainability as a core element, especially for tourism students. By aligning the syllabus with the UN SDGs, educators can ensure that the content is not only relevant but also addresses the pressing global challenges faced by the tourism industry. Accordingly, ESP syllabi for tourism students can include practical tasks such as developing sustainable tourism proposals or analysing case studies of successful eco-tourism initiatives. This alignment of ESP with UN SDGs fosters a deeper understanding of sustainability concepts and practices, enabling students to apply their language skills in real-world scenarios.

1.2 Needs Analysis in Language Education

Needs analysis in language education is a very crucial process in defining what learners need to learn in using the language as proffered by the teacher and curriculum designer. It involves the collection of detailed information on learners' backgrounds and goals, and contexts where they would use the language, among other things as opined by Richards (2001). In this way, if specific needs can be identified, then the teacher can make the lessons relevant and engaging so that the students will have more desire to achieve the goals set; personal and professional. The understanding of learners' needs helps the teacher to focus on the most imperative vocabulary, grammar and communication skills that should be acquired by the learners for the purpose expected to be accomplished (Brown, 2016). Conducting a thorough needs analysis is therefore essential for developing an effective ESP syllabus that meets the unique language learning needs of the target student population.

There exists an integral relationship that bonds language needs assessment and ESP curriculum design in the development of effective pedagogical programs. Needs assessment helps to identify the clear goals and specific linguistic needs of the learners based on their

professional or academic environment. Targeted information of this kind guides the design and development of the ESP curriculum so that it becomes relevant and aligned with the learners' practical needs. Once practitioners know what learners need to be able to do, it is possible to work out a curriculum that focuses on relevant language skills and real-life use, which in turn generates a better learning experience and better results.

Teachers use all sorts of methods to obtain the whole picture of what students need. Surveys, interviews, and questionnaires can dig into learners' motivation and expectations (Graves, 2000); whereas diagnostic and proficiency tests yield tangible data on students' current language competency level (Long, 2005). Both qualitative and quantitative methods yield an extremely detailed picture of each learner's strengths and weaknesses. For example, if one is a business professional, then more emphasis on formal writing and presentation skills will be needed, or if one uses the language just for general use, then one will probably want to pay more attention to the conversation.

Ultimately, needs analysis has the effect of benefiting everyone involved in the process of learning a language. On the one hand, , the instruction for students will be directly connected to needs, goals, and practical language use guidance. Thereby they will bolster motivation and engagement to learn. According to Hyland (2006), on the other hand, detailed guidance is provided to educators on what they should focus on in terms of teaching. Hence, teaching is made more efficient and effective with this kind of approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Since language education today aims for the acquisition of effective global communication skills, needs analysis remains a very viable tool in developing responsive learning programs that are dynamic and growth-oriented (Richards, 2013). By adopting this proactive approach, educators can anticipate changes in real-world communication trends and effectively adapt the course to align with evolving global market demands (Lasekan, Moraga-Pumarino, & Pachava, 2023). As sustainable development is an emerging need in today's world (Astawa et al., 2024), adapting ESP courses to reflect these priorities is considered a crucial factor in developing modern and relevant ESP Syllabi.

1.3 The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The UN SDGs were universally adopted by all member states in 2015, establishing a comprehensive plan for attaining peace, prosperity, and environmental sustainability for both present and future generations. The essence of this ambitious initiative is 17 goals that serve as an urgent call to action, requiring collaborative global partnerships between developed and developing nations (United Nations, 2022). Figure 1 demonstrates the 17 SDGs.

Figure 1. The 17 UN SDGs (Note 1)

Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Website: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment

The logo demonstrates the interconnected nature of the goals and how they relate to and serve each other. Their ultimate purpose is represented in the eradication of poverty and other societal deprivations through implementing strategies that simultaneously improve public health and education, reduce economic and social inequalities, drive sustainable economic growth, and save natural ecosystems. Since improving educational outcomes holds the potential to drive transformative change across multiple development domains, these strategies are well represented in UN SDG 4 "Quality Education" and can be reflected in many other goals considerably UN SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth".

1.3.1 UN SDG 4: Quality Education

The fourth of the UN SDGs is "Quality Education" which aims mainly to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2022). UN defined 10 targets and 12 indicators for SDG 4. As it is stated, the general framework for the goal is to ensure equitable quality education. Achieving this is represented in targets that focus on aspects such as the level of completion of basic education, proficiency in basic and ICT skills, inclusivity, supply of teachers etc. The UN sets clear indicators to monitor the achievement of such targets.

One specific target within SDG 4 is target 4.7, which states that "[b]y 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development" (United Nations, 2022). To monitor the achievement of this target, the UN has established indicator 4.7.1, which measures the "[e]xtent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment". Accordingly, it is believed that enriching syllabi with education for ESD-related content and skills will enhance the achievement of this target and prepare global citizens who acknowledge and engage with the global challenges (Yu, et al., 2024). In this context, ESP syllabi can be considered optimal platforms for incorporating such themes.

1.3.2 UN SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Achieving SDG 4 is believed to contribute to the achievement of other SDGs. An example of these SDGs is SDG 8 which aims to "[p]romote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (United Nations, 2022). The UN has established 12 targets and 16 indicators for SDG 8, with the general goal of fostering inclusive and sustainable standards of economic development that benefit both workers and the environment. This can be achieved by equipping workers with the appropriate knowledge and skills related to sustainable development, enabling them to secure decent jobs across different sectors.

One specific target under SDG 8 is Target 8.9, which states that "[b]y 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products" (United Nations, 2022). While syllabus design may not be considered a direct policy, governmental and educational institutions can adopt policies to promote sustainable tourism practices. This could involve developing curricula and training programs that impart sustainable tourism knowledge and skills to workers in the tourism industry, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG 8 targets.

1.4 Context and Rationale

Following the launch of the Saudi Vision (2030), considerable attention was paid to more economic sectors to diversify economic income and avoid reliance on an oil-only economy (Aljabour, 2017). Of the most potential sectors of these is tourism as Saudi Arabia contains many religious, historical and natural tourist attractions. Emerging from the Saudi Vision 2030, the national tourism strategy of Saudi Arabia aims to "strengthen Islamic and national identity, grow and diversify the economy, increase employment, and enhance government effectiveness" (The Saudi Ministry of Tourism 2023). These objectives were to be achieved by hosting 100 million visits by 2030, supporting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 10%, and creating around 1.6 million job opportunities. This growing sector entails a highly skilled workforce that is equipped with the necessary language skills to enable them to communicate effectively which makes developing English language skills essential (Mohamed & Halim, 2024). Additionally, familiarizing students with the UN SDGs related to the tourism industry would make them more effective in carrying out their tourism-related tasks and jobs.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that the adoption of SDGs in Saudi Arabia is insufficient and lacks proper monitoring (Alanazi, Klinkenberg, & Klinkenberg , 2022). Furthermore, the language used in presenting the roadmap for implementing ESD in Saudi Arabia exhibits a high level of generalisation and vagueness in the proposed procedures for integrating ESD into the education system. Consequently, there is a lack of a comprehensive strategic plan with well-defined pre-determined steps (Essa & Harvey, 2022) which entail studies that directly show how this integration could be implemented. Accordingly, the rationale for this study is to propose procedures to align an English-for-Tourism syllabus with the UN SDGs in Saudi Arabia as a representative example while the global nature of both the English Language and the UN SDGs makes generalizing the findings of the present study to other global contexts possible.

1.5 Research Question

The present study aims to answer the following research question:

How can a needs-analysis-based ESP syllabus be developed to promote the UN SDGs; particularly Quality Education (SDG 4) and Decent Work for All (SDG 8)?

To answer this question, the researchers followed the methods and procedures discussed in the following section.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The current research employs the Delphi technique as it is considered an appropriate method to gather expert opinions on the subject matter (Hsu, 2007). The Delphi technique involves iterative communication processes with multinational or multidisciplinary experts in relevant fields aiming at reaching a consensus on the investigated issue. This methodology has been previously employed in curriculum design studies, such as those conducted by (Muhammad, Said, Syarifudin, and Patak (2019) and Baba and Yusop (2020).   This method is deemed suitable for the present study as it is believed that needs analysis can determine students' and employers' needs however, developing a

syllabus that meets the global and evolving needs of the English language is a task that can be better achieved by obtaining perspectives from experts of multidisciplinary and multinational backgrounds. This task can be more effectively accomplished through the Delphi method. Furthermore, this technique is based on the outcomes of the needs analysis, making it economical, as it does not require preliminary rounds for preparing the survey elements. The experts' opinions will be centred around the development of the already-established needs-analysis syllabus.

2.2 Participants

The expert panel for the current study incorporated 23 experts from different countries. The panel included academics in the fields of ESP, TESOL, applied linguistics, tourism, economy, and environmental studies as shown in Figure 2 below.
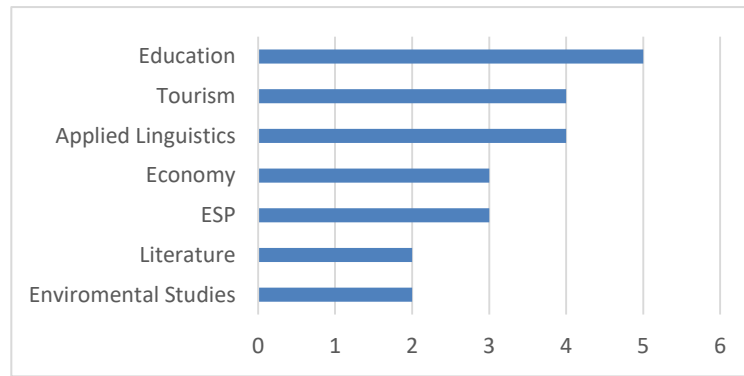

Figure 2. Panel members' characteristics per discipline

Figure 2 shows that 14 (61%) of the members specialize in fields related to English language and education, while others major in fields related to sustainability. The panellists were selected based on their expertise in the field of ESP syllabus design, English language teaching and their publication on the topic of SD. Most of the members are located in Saudi Arabia, though they are from different nationalities while the others were being contacted according to their publicly available biographical information. Table 1 summarizes the panel characteristics.

Table 1. Panel Members Characteristics

Gender		Academic Ranks		Origin/Nationality	
Female	Male	Masters	PhD	Country*	Number
13	10	2	21	Saudi Arabia	13
				Indonesia	3
				Egypt	2
				Sudan	2
				India	1
				Pakistan	1
				Nigeria	1
				Total	**23**

* Note. Country of origin or work affiliation or both.

Most of the members are either Saudi Arabian or experts who have worked for Saudi universities for the previous 7 years making them aware of the country and the needs of the ESP learners and the tourism sectors. Experts from other countries were selected based on their publications on topics related to teaching the English language to tourism sector students, and issues on SD.

2.3 Material

The material of the current study is a needs-analysis-based ESP syllabus that is being developed for tour guide students and it is titled English for Tour Guides (ETG). The initial stage of developing this syllabus has already been completed and reported in a previous study, (Mohammed & Sanosi, 2024).

The first version of the syllabus was developed based on a needs analysis conducted with tour guides and representatives from the tourism industry. The respondents provided information on the language skills, aspects, and functions required for tour guides in Saudi Arabia. Based on these identified target needs, the first draft of the syllabus referred to as ETG v. 1, was designed and made publicly available (Note 2).

To further enhance this initial version of the syllabus, the ETG 1 syllabus was provided to an expert panel for review, evaluation, and refinement. This enhancement process follows the Delphi technique, to align the syllabus with the UN SDGs, and it resulted in the second version of the ETG i.e. ETG v. 2, which is available on the same link as ETG v. 1.

2.4 Data Collection Method

To collect the data regarding the syllabus enhancement and development the researchers used a Delphi survey of two rounds and unstructured interviews with some members of the panel, particularly those who provided arguments regarding some aspects of developing

the syllabus that need further discussion. Before conducting the survey, the researchers had already contacted the experts and informed them about the research project. The experts were provided with a copy of the syllabus ETG v. 1 and a copy of the research paper detailing the procedures for developing the syllabus. After confirming that the experts understood the syllabus, were willing to participate in all the Delphi rounds, and had no potential conflicts of interest, the researchers then presented the experts with the survey for the first round.

2.4.1 Delphi Survey Round 1

In the first round, a 10-item questionnaire was used and launched through the Google Forms tool. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first section included 5 Likert scale questions surveying the experts' evaluation of the syllabus coverage of the target needs, and its alignment with the intended goals, Learning Outcomes (LOs), and the UN SDGs, particularly Targets 4.7 and 8.9, while the second section incorporated 5 open-ended questions where the panel members were asked to provide their suggestions to improve the syllabus and align it with the specified elements. The purpose of this round was to gather both quantitative and qualitative feedback from the expert panel, with the Likert scale questions providing a structured evaluation of the syllabus, and the open-ended questions allowing the experts to offer their insights and recommendations for enhancing the syllabus's alignment with the specified criteria. The gathered data from this round was used to develop the second survey questionnaire.

2.4.2 Delphi Survey Round 2

Based on the experts' evaluation and the interview output from the first round, the syllabus was updated into the ETG 2 version. Then, a second survey was designed to reconcile the experts' views and achieve a near-consensus or consensus regarding the revisions made to the syllabus. The second survey included 8 items of which 4 were in Likert-Scale format and the other 4 were open-ended questions. The focus of the question was to gather the panel's views regarding the updated version in terms of its LOs, target needs, and UN SDG 4; target 4.7.

2.5 Data Analysis

As two types of data were available from the two surveys and interviews, both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were used. For the Likert-scale questions, the mean response for each question was calculated. These averages were then analyzed according to five predefined intervals, as outlined in Table 2, given that the questions required the respondents to show the extent to which they think the syllabus aligned with the specified criteria.

Table 2. Rubrics for analysing Likert-scale questions results

Average value	Result	Description
1.0 – 1.8	Not at all	The syllabus doesn't align with the criterion.
1.9 – 2.6	Slightly	The syllabus slightly aligns with the criterion.
2.7 – 3.4	Moderately	The syllabus moderately aligns with the criterion.
3.5 – 4.2	Very much	The syllabus aligns well with the criterion.
4.2 – 5.0	Completely	The syllabus completely aligns with the criterion.

Additionally, the Standard Deviation (SD) was calculated to provide more insight into the levels of agreement between the responses elicited for each question which will support the update process of both the syllabus and the second round of the questionnaire. The syllabus has been updated according to the level of consensus in most of the cases. All the items that received an average of less than 3.4 or an SD value of more than 1.5 have been considered for an update.

Regarding the qualitative analysis of the data, all the responses to all 5 open-ended questions were sorted and ranked. Consistent with the previous literature on the Delphi technique, where survey questions for subsequent rounds are typically updated based on the level of consensus in the previous rounds (Hsu, 2007), the researchers in this study updated or modified only the items that were repeated by 30% (7 out of the 23 experts) or more. This 30% threshold was deemed reasonable given the interdisciplinary nature of the expert panel and the context of updating an educational syllabus, as it balances the need for broad consensus while still allowing for valuable suggestions from a diverse range of expertise. However, the researchers acknowledged that "it is often where consensus is not evident that the interesting and important issues emerge" (Wright & Rowe, 2011, p. 1488), and thus this was not an absolute condition for updating the items. Accordingly, further interviews were conducted with most panel members who provided insightful suggestions that were deemed useful to the research but needed more explanation. These interviews were conducted face-to-face with the available participants and through email with international ones who provided their contact information. Any suggestions that were considered irrelevant or unrelated to the research topic were disregarded.

2.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the research instrument (the survey), the researchers adopted the needs analysis items that were used to design the initial version of the syllabus as the foundation for developing the main questionnaire. This approach was based on the ground that the needs analysis items had already been validated and utilized in the syllabus design process, as documented in a previously published, peer-reviewed paper (Mohammed & Sanosi, 2024). Furthermore, the researchers constructed a questionnaire that incorporated a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions aimed at eliciting the expert panellists' perspectives on the syllabus components. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a group of 5 experts, and minor modifications were made to some of the questions based on their feedback.

The experts were carefully selected based on their academic rank, publications in the field, and years of experience, and the questionnaire

was administered through Google Forms to enable the experts to respond individually and avoid potential peer pressure. After each round of data collection, a summary of the feedback from the previous round was provided to the panellists, to explain areas of consensus and disagreement, and the questions for the subsequent round were then refined based on the panellists' responses to ensure that each round of the survey accurately captured the expert perspectives on the syllabus components under investigation.

For the reliability of the research tool, the researchers computed Cronbach's Alpha for the Likert-scale questions. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability that assesses the extent to which the items in a questionnaire measure the same underlying construct. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.76, indicating a good level of internal consistency. This suggests that the survey items are reliably measuring the extent to which respondents believe the syllabus aligns with specified criteria.

3. Results

This article aims to explore ways to develop an ESP Syllabus to align with the UN SDGs. The material of the study is a needs-analysis syllabus which is presented to a panel of experts through the Delphi techniques. The output from each round is presented below to answer the research question which was:

How can a needs-analysis-based ESP syllabus be developed to promote the UN SDGs; particularly Quality Education (SDG 4) and Decent Work for All (SDG 8)?

3.1 Delphi Survey Round 1

The first round of the questionnaire aimed to evaluate the first version of the syllabus (ETG v. 1) (See Appendix A for a summary of the syllabus). For the first part of the questionnaire, which includes closed questions, the average and SD values of the responses were computed to find the agreement level and the dispersion of the experts' responses, and the results displayed in Table 3 were yielded.

Table 3. The panellists' perspectives towards ETG 1

Item no.	Perceived level of agreement with …	Average	Results	SD
1	The target needs	4.52	Completely	0.7
2	The specified goals	4.48	Completely	0.7
3	The expected learning outcomes	3.26	Moderately	0.8
4	UN SDG 4 – Target 4.7	2.52	Slightly	1.5
5	UN SDG 8 – Target 8.9	2.70	Moderately	1.3

The results showed that the panellists had a high level of agreement that the syllabus completely aligns with both the target needs and specified goals and is moderately aligned with the expected LOs and UN SDG 8. They also agreed that ETG v. 1 has slight alignment with the UN SDG 4, though their level of agreement around its alignment with both UN SDGs was low as implied by the high SD values. These results implied that to promote UN SDGs related to quality education and decent work for all, ESP syllabus should be developed in terms of their goals, and learning outcomes and more content should be added that aligned with the corresponding SDGs.

The second part of the survey was in the form of open-ended questions returning suggestions and comments regarding the ESP syllabus development processes. The qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions and interviews revealed the following results (ordered according to the level of consensus):

1. Nineteen experts, (83%) of the panel members, suggest adding topics related to UN SDGs such as sustainability, cultural diversity, human rights, peace, and equality respectively.

2. Fourteen panellists (61%) suggested adding LOs that directly consider the knowledge of UN SDGs and the ability to apply it in reality.

3. Twelve respondents, (57%) of the panel, suggested updating the goals to account for knowledge and ability to disseminate UN SDGs as a learning goal.

4. Suggestions to add lessons that focus on grammar were significant as they were provided by 10 members (43%) of the panellists, though according to the target needs grammar was ranked low in the needs of the respondents.

5. Seven experts (30%) of the panel suggested updates for the content such as deleting the unit about religion or merging it with the introduction about Saudi Arabia and merging the units about tourist attractions.

6. Four experts (17%) argued that the SDG 8 elements were more relevant to policy and planning than to the syllabus content. Despite the relatively low initial consensus on this issue, it was proved insightful after a careful review of the UN SDGs and their targets and indicators, and extensive discussion during the expert interviews, the researchers ultimately decided to remove the SDG 8-related elements from the second round of the survey.

7. Other suggestions were deemed insightful such as aligning the grammar lessons with the unit topic, systematically presenting vocabulary, and keeping consistency in the presentation of the syllabus components.

8. No suggestions regarding the update of the target needs.

The results materialize the experts' views of how to develop the syllabus in parallel to the assigned criteria showing more details of the process. Accordingly, the syllabus was updated and the new syllabus ETG v. 2 (see Appendix B) was uploaded and shared with experts. Subsequently, the second round of the survey was updated and a summary of the experts' responses for the first round was attached with

another summary of the modifications conducted to give respondent feedback on the first round that can help them to reconsider their first responses accordingly. The results of the second round are provided in the next section.

3.2 Delphi Survey Round 2

Results from the Round 2 survey analysis revealed greater consensus with higher agreement concerning the panel members' perspectives on the alignment of the syllabus with the set criteria. The analysis revealed the results displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The panellists' perspectives towards ETG 2

Item no.	Perceived level of agreement with …	Average	Results	SD
1	The specified goals	4.78	Completely	0.4
2	The expected learning outcomes	4.86	Completely	0.5
3	UN SDG 4 – Target 4.7	4.36	Completely	0.8

The experts agreed that the updated syllabus aligns with the updated goals and LOs, and the added content successfully meets the requirement to align with the aspects of UN SDG 4 specifically target 4.7 that call for fostering students' knowledge with SD aspects related to environment, human being and culture.

Though most experts modified their initial answers according to the updates and the feedback provided by the researchers concerning the responses from the first round, there were still some additional suggestions from the panellists, primarily focused on the content of the syllabus. Below is a summary of these suggestions which were taken from the panellists' responses to the open-ended questions.

More content was suggested to be added about ecosystems, state efforts to preserve the environment, and climate change issues.

More language functions were suggested for inclusion, namely giving directions, map reading, and polite instructions.

The expert panel provided suggestions related to enhancing the language skills and aspects of the syllabus, such as including more conversational activities that mimic real-world scenarios related to the content, as well as aligning the grammatical lessons, vocabulary, and reading components more consistently and systematically throughout the syllabus.

Some experts suggest reconsidering the assessment methods used in the syllabus to focus more on practical activities such as presentations, role-play, and speaking activities rather than depending on quizzes and tests.

These suggestions were discussed with the experts who proposed them and several have been incorporated in the final version of the syllabus of which a summary is provided in Appendix C.

4. Discussion

The results of the Delphi technique provided that the ESP syllabus can be developed to meet aspects of sustainability by focusing mainly on learning goals, and LOs and integrating relevant content into the syllabus. This process should be done in synergy and symmetry with the language skills, aspects and functions included in the syllabus. Though the students' target needs are the base of such syllabus, the update process should not be confined to those needs, rather, it should accompany the global needs that are represented in the UN SDGs.

These findings correspond to the UN call for ESD (UNESCO, 2017) that called for integrating sustainability in education to acquaint students with the appropriate knowledge and skills that enable them to disseminate and promote sustainability and its practice. As language is a pivotal factor in that, previous research also coincided with the current findings in that ESP courses should be developed according to these principles (Arslan & Curle, 2021; Astawa et al., 2024; Rada, 2022; Yu et al., 2024). Overall, the incorporation of ESD-related content and skills into ESP syllabi can be a valuable approach to nurturing globally-minded citizens capable of addressing the challenges of SD.

The initial focus of the panellists was on goal updates. It is implied that to better set the principles for a robust syllabus that meets sustainability, the goals should clearly articulate equipping the students with both content knowledge regarding sustainability and then focus on language skills that enable them to promote these aspects. Further, language skills, aspects, and functions should be utilized and manipulated to serve such purposes. This will be through providing relevant vocabulary to SD and developing language skills and grammar knowledge that enable students to communicate effectively regarding these issues. These points were raised previously in studies about the role of English language education in sustainability for example (Römhild et al., 2023) and especially in the tourism sector (Mohamed & Halim, 2024) and (Šimková, Kořínková, & Obršálová, 2023) . The fact that the expert panel is composed of multinational experts enhances that the issue is global and agreed upon by experts.

Considering the details of the goals and targets to be focused on by the ESP syllabus designers, the findings revealed that UN SDG 4 (Quality Education) represents the main pillar that can inform the development of the syllabus. More specifically, while the first targets related to these goals focus on policies and planning in education in general, target 4.7 provides a clear framework for developing the syllabus as it provides the main themes of the SD that can be included in the syllabus. Language education and tourism sectors are optimal fields for applying such themes as they are strongly related to tourism practice, culture and communication thereof.

On the other hand, while SDG 8 seems closely related to both the output of the syllabus and the tourism sector (as it mentions sustainable tourism as an example of a sector that creates decent jobs and promotes local culture and products), the findings show disagreement with the suggestion of directly addressing it in the ESP syllabus. Some respondents argued that integrating UNSDG 8 per se in the syllabus is neither relevant nor applicable as it relates to language and education policy and deals with how the output of education, in general, is capable of doing that. One expert states "I think it is not the responsibility of the syllabus itself to secure jobs and develop economy, this is the task of

educational institutions, syllabi only assist this by preparing students for such professional life" (Ex_13) while another expert (Ex_21) more openly says that ″I recommend avoid mentioning UNSDG 8 in any part of the syllabus or its component, it is inevitable and can be achieved by promoting UNSDG 4, just like most other UNSGDs″.

The fact that the relationship between UNSDG 4 and other goals is inevitable is recognized by the study, and the selection of UNSG 8 is based on the relation between decent jobs, namely sustainable tourism, and quality education. However, the researchers acknowledge that promoting knowledge and skills of SD through quality education can also promote other goals such as Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Responsible Consumption (SDG 12) and Climate Action (SDG 13). Further studies on this strand can focus on these goals and how ESP syllabi can promote them.

The findings also show that the experts have focused more on the content knowledge to be updated in the ESP syllabus than on the linguistic aspects. Mostly, suggestions regarding the update revolve around adding reading and listening content to enlighten students about sustainability, cultural diversity, global citizenship, and human rights and peace. When it comes to linguistics aspects, the experts recommend adapting them to accommodate these concepts, rather than developing them as standalone elements. Here, appears the difference between the classic needs-analysis techniques that address the individual needs of learners and their employers which may focus on the professional practice of the prospected job (Brown, 2013), and the experts' views which accompany the global needs as those stated by the UN SDGs. This coincides with the claims of the previous studies that language teaching should not be confined only to teaching linguistic skills and aspects (Yu et al., 2024), they should rather account for other trending and urgent issues in the global context such as those related to peace, human rights, and SD (Matz & Römhild, 2024). Subsequently, language syllabi nowadays "are not only tools for learning a specific language, but they also serve as windows to the world" (Risager, 2020, p. 12). The English language is the optimal tool to achieve this since it is a lingua franca that can be powerfully used to address such issues.

The findings reveal other ways to promote the ESP syllabus to promote sustainability. Mostly technical in nature. These suggestions focus on updating listening and speaking skills to account for sustainability-related themes, enriching vocabulary content according to the inserted content and enhancing grammar in a style that promotes effective communication. Regarding assessment, it is suggested that it should be updated and aligned with classroom and field participation in semi-real scenarios that imitate real tour guides' practice and apply the language functions stated in the target needs. One expert states that "assessment for the syllabus should focus on conversation, presentation, role play, field trips and planning tourist itineraries, I think quizzes and exams are not effective in this syllabus and they should be kept to the minimum" (Ex_7).

These results build on existing evidence of the importance of integrating SD aspects in education to account for the global trends of ESD as announced by (UNESCO, 2017). It particularly focuses on the role of language learning in enhancing such aspects. The expert panel perspectives reveal a high similarity with the existing literature on incorporating content knowledge along with linguistic skills and aspects to account for such incorporation. The results can provide practical implications on how to conduct that depending on the structured steps starting by identifying goals, and LOs of the syllabus and selecting suitable content to use along with special recommendations on how to employ linguistic skills and aspects to serve the general goals and achieve the specified LOs. Such implications can be insightful for ESP syllabus designers to inform their syllabus-making procedures, and for policymakers as they provide indicators of how the educational system incorporates sustainable development items, and how it can be useful for teachers as they inform them of how to teach such syllabi.

While these results are in line with the previous literature on incorporating SD in education and the importance of language in this domain particularly in ESP for tourism, their generalizability should be considered with caution, given the potential limitations of the study. The most significant limitation is that the key stakeholders of the syllabus, i.e. students are not involved in the study as it is based on a needs-analysis syllabus by professionals in the field of tourism and their employers. Surveying the students in advance would provide a clearer picture of the students' current knowledge and understanding of the UN SDGs. This information could then be used to tailor the content of the syllabus to better match the students' prior knowledge and competencies.

5. Conclusion

The evolving concept of SD in today's world recognizes Quality Education (UN SDG 4) as a key goal, with the understanding that achieving this goal can also facilitate the attainment of other sustainable development objectives. Accordingly, it is widely believed that the principles and practices of SD can be effectively promoted and developed through education. In this context, the present paper addresses the best approaches to developing an ESP tourism syllabus that aligns with these emerging trends. According to the surveyed experts, this can be accomplished by setting relevant goals and LOs, and by enriching the syllabus content with topics related to key sustainability issues, such as eco-conservation, climate change, cultural diversity, global citizenship, and human rights. Importantly, linguistic skills and aspects should also be integrated into these contexts in a way that enhances the acquisition of content knowledge and the development of student's abilities to both practice sustainability and effectively communicate its practices, making tourism an appropriate and relevant sector to achieve this integration of sustainability education and language skills development.

As the topic of integrating SD concepts into ESP curricula is still a trending and evolving area of research, further investigations can add valuable insights to the current findings. It is recommended that future studies include a wider range of stakeholders, such as students and ESP teachers, and explore other ESP disciplines beyond tourism, such as economics, and other social sciences. Comparing the existing ESP syllabi to the current research findings will reveal the gaps between the status quo of the ESP curriculum and the desired state of alignment with SD principles. This, in turn, will set the stage for more targeted curriculum development initiatives. Additionally, following up on the

outcomes of such revised syllabi will provide valuable insights into the process of successfully integrating the UN SDGs into ESP programs. This can be achieved by evaluating the performance of professionals who have studied these courses, either using developed assessment rubrics or by applying the indicators set by the UN to evaluate the status of the implementation of the UN SDGs.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Abdulaziz B. Sanosi conceived the study, supervised data collection and analysis, and contributed to writing the results and discussion. Dr. Hala S Nur developed the theoretical framework for the ESP syllabus design and revised related results and discussion. Dr. Yasir Arafat created the theoretical framework for sustainability and the UN SDGs and proofread the manuscript. Dr. Dikko Muhammed wrote the needs analysis theoretical framework and reviewed the article. All authors participated in writing the manuscript, discussed the results, and approved the final draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25834636

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Notes:

Note 1. The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.

Note 2. ETG v. 1 and ETG v. 2 are available at: https://figshare.com/s/3140e6ccda47cc66f73a

Appendix A. Summary of ETG Syllabus v. 1

Unit	Topic	Listening	Function	Grammar	Reading	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Speaking	Writing
1	Tour Guide Career L	Tour Guides Qualities	Introducing yourself and others Welcoming/ Greeting tourists	Verb to be Pronouns (my, his) This/That	What does a tour guide do?	Job-related vocabulary. Suffixes and prefixes	Phonetic alphabet/symbols	Tour guide job skills Describing a job	
2	About KSA	Saudi Arabia	Giving instructions	Imperative Modal verbs 1: Will, shall, may Past simple		History, geography vocabulary Noun-forming suffixes	English short vowels	Presentation 1: Getting Started Talking about history	Writing a CV
3	Religion in KSA	The Great Mosque of Mecca	Giving information	There is/are Question forms Adjectives	Religion in Saudi: A guide to Islam	Religious places Adjectives Adjective-forming suffixes	English long vowels	Informing about Islamic places Presentation 2: the main part	
4	Tourism 1 Attractions	Places to visit in KSA	Offering help	Comparative/ Superlative adjectives 1		Tourist destinations Sightseeing Verb-forming suffixes	Transcription Syllables	Describing a place Comparing places	Emails 1: Starting the message Attachments Word combinations with 'email' Requests
5	Tourism Attractions 2	Riyadh Attractions	Making suggestions	Present simple tense 1 Passive voice	al-Masmak Palace	History vocabulary Prefixes and their meaning	Diphthongs	Justifying suggestions Answering questions Presentation 3: Charts and graphs	
6	Tourism Attractions 3	Museums in KSA	Apologizing Dealing with complaints	Modal verbs 2: can, could, must, have to Comparative/ superlative adjectives 2		Noun- forming suffixes Museums vocabulary	Word stress 1 Online dictionaries	Explaining safety procedures Arranging appointments Presentation 4: Comparing trends	Emails 2: Good and bad news Ending emails Email and text language
7	Festivals	Riyadh Season	Asking for permission	Expressing future actions	Riyadh season: An overview	Festival and celebrations Noun-forming Suffixes	Word stress 2	Giving Programme information Answering questions	
8	Future of Tourism in KSA	Tourism and Vision 2030	Saying goodbye Asking for opinions	Expressing Future actions		Tourism terms	Connected speech	Talking about future plans	Writing tourism information leaflet

Source: Mohammad, A. S. & Sanosi, A. B. Designing a Needs-based English Syllabus for Tour Guides in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 15 (3), 972-983. http://dx.doi.org/10.18355/XL.2019.12.04.12

Appendix B. Summary of ETG Syllabus v. 2

Module no.	Title and Skills	Vocabulary & Grammar	Functions	Activity & Assessment
1	**Tour Guide Career** Reading – listening - speaking	**Synonyms and antonyms** Present simple tense	Introducing & greeting	**Roleplay** Class Participation
2	**Saudi Arabia: Past & Present** Reading – listening - Writing	**Compounding** Past simple – present perfect	Giving information	**Email exchange.** Quiz
3	**Sustainable Tourism** Listening – speaking - writing	**Deviation (suffixes)** Progressive tenses	Giving Instructions Making Suggestions	**Forum Discussion** Peer review
4	**Saudi Tourist Attractions** Reading – listening - speaking	**Derivation (suffixes)** Adjectives. & Adverbs	Offering help Giving information	**Group work.** Essay
5	**Cultural Diversity** Reading – listening - speaking	**Borrowed words.** Relative clauses	Apologizing Dealing with complaints	**Presentation** Quiz
6	**Lifestyles and Tourism** Reading – listening - speaking	**Compounding** The future simple	Giving information Asking for opinions	**Wiki composition** Peer review
7	**Social Responsibility** Listening – speaking - writing	**Derivational prefixes** The passive voice	Giving instructions. Making suggestion	**Roleplay** Essay
8	**Human Rights and Tourism** Listening – speaking - writing	**Synonyms & Antonyms** Conditional clauses	Asking for permission Offering help	**Presentation** Final exam

Appendix C. Summary of ETG Syllabus v. 3

Module no.	Title and Skills	Vocabulary & Grammar	Functions	Activity & Assessment
1	**Tour Guide Career** Reading – listening - speaking	**Synonyms and antonyms** Articles - Present simple tense	Introducing & greeting	**Roleplay** Class Participation
2	**Saudi Arabia: Past & Present** Reading – listening - Writing	**Compounding** Prepositions - Past simple – present perfect	Giving information/directions	**Email exchange.** Quiz
3	**Saudi Tourist Attractions** Reading – listening - speaking	**Derivation (suffixes)** Adjectives. & Adverbs	Offering help Giving information	**Group work.** Essay
4	**Sustainable Tourism** Listening – speaking - writing	**Derivation (suffixes)** Progressive tenses	Giving Instructions Making Suggestions	**Forum Discussion** Peer review
5	**Cultural Diversity** Reading – listening - speaking	**Borrowed words.** Relative clauses	Apologizing Dealing with complaints	**Presentation** Quiz
6	**Lifestyles and Tourism** Reading – listening - speaking	**Compounding** The future simple	Giving information Asking for opinions	**Wiki composition** Peer review
7	**Social Responsibility** Listening – speaking - writing	**Derivational prefixes**	Giving instructions. Making suggestion	**Roleplay** Essay
8	**Human Rights and Tourism** Listening – speaking - writing	**Synonyms & Antonyms**	Asking for permission Offering help	**Presentation** Final exam