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Green Entrepreneurship: Reimagining Ethical Business Education for Sustainable Global Communities

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Abstract

The imperative for sustainable development has positioned green entrepreneurship at the forefront of contemporary business education discourse. This article examines the transformative role of ethical business education in fostering sustainable global communities through green entrepreneurial initiatives. By analyzing current pedagogical approaches, stakeholder perspectives, and implementation challenges, this work explores how educational institutions can effectively integrate sustainability principles into entrepreneurship curricula. The discussion encompasses three critical dimensions: the theoretical foundations of green entrepreneurship education, innovative pedagogical strategies for sustainability integration, and the role of ethical frameworks in shaping future business leaders. Drawing upon recent scholarly literature, this article argues that reimagining business education through a sustainability lens is essential for addressing contemporary environmental challenges while creating economically viable enterprises. The findings suggest that holistic, experiential, and ethically grounded educational approaches are crucial for developing entrepreneurs capable of balancing profit with planetary stewardship and social responsibility in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The convergence of environmental crises, social inequalities, and economic pressures has catalyzed a fundamental rethinking of business education in the twenty-first century. Traditional entrepreneurship education, historically focused on profit maximization and competitive advantage, faces mounting criticism for inadequately preparing business leaders to address sustainability challenges (Leal Filho et al., 2021). The emergence of green entrepreneurship as a distinct field represents a paradigmatic shift toward integrating environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability within entrepreneurial ventures. This transformation demands educational institutions to reconsider their pedagogical approaches, curricula content, and institutional values to cultivate a new generation of entrepreneurs equipped with sustainability competencies.

Green entrepreneurship, defined as the creation of innovative ventures that simultaneously generate economic value while reducing environmental impact and promoting social welfare, has gained significant traction in academic and practitioner communities (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018). According to Schaltegger and Wagner (2011), green entrepreneurs are individuals who recognize environmental problems as business opportunities and develop solutions that contribute to sustainable development. This conceptualization extends beyond traditional business models by embedding ecological and social considerations into core entrepreneurial processes, from opportunity recognition to value creation and delivery. The rising prominence of green entrepreneurship reflects broader societal demands for businesses to operate responsibly within planetary boundaries while addressing pressing social challenges.

Business education institutions bear particular responsibility for shaping entrepreneurial mindsets and competencies that align with sustainability imperatives. Laasch and Conaway (2015) argue that business schools must transition from teaching business in society to teaching business for society, emphasizing the transformative potential of education in fostering sustainable business practices. This reorientation requires integrating sustainability principles across curricula, developing new pedagogical methods that emphasize experiential learning, and cultivating ethical reasoning capabilities among students. Furthermore, educators must address the complexity and interdisciplinarity inherent in sustainability challenges, which demand collaborative problem-solving and systems thinking skills.

The ethical dimension of business education constitutes a critical foundation for green entrepreneurship development. Painter-Morland et al. (2016) emphasize that ethical business education should move beyond compliance-based approaches to foster moral imagination and reflexive practice among future entrepreneurs. By engaging students in critical reflection on the social and environmental consequences of business decisions, educators can develop ethical sensibilities that transcend narrow profit-seeking orientations. This ethical grounding becomes particularly salient in green entrepreneurship, where

entrepreneurs must navigate complex trade-offs between economic, environmental, and social objectives while maintaining stakeholder trust and legitimacy.

Global communities face unprecedented sustainability challenges, including climate change, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and social inequality, which require innovative entrepreneurial responses. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for addressing these challenges, calling for collaborative action across sectors and geographies (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Green entrepreneurship offers promising pathways for achieving these goals by mobilizing entrepreneurial creativity, innovation, and market mechanisms toward sustainability outcomes. However, realizing this potential necessitates educational systems that effectively prepare entrepreneurs to recognize sustainability opportunities, develop viable green business models, and navigate the institutional complexities of sustainable development.

This article examines how ethical business education can be reimagined to foster green entrepreneurship and contribute to sustainable global communities. By synthesizing recent scholarly perspectives and analyzing contemporary educational practices, this work identifies key opportunities and challenges in integrating sustainability into entrepreneurship education. The subsequent sections explore the theoretical foundations of green entrepreneurship education, innovative pedagogical strategies for sustainability integration, and the role of ethical frameworks in shaping responsible business leaders. Through this analysis, the article contributes to ongoing discussions about the future of business education in an era of environmental urgency and social transformation.

DISCUSSIONS

Theoretical Foundations of Green Entrepreneurship Education

The theoretical landscape of green entrepreneurship education draws upon multiple disciplinary traditions, integrating insights from environmental economics, organizational ecology, sustainability science, and entrepreneurship theory. Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) propose that green entrepreneurship education must be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development principles, recognizing the interconnections between environmental integrity, social equity, and economic prosperity. This triple-bottom-line perspective challenges traditional entrepreneurship education's narrow focus on financial performance, requiring students to develop capabilities in environmental impact assessment, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable value creation. Theoretical frameworks such as natural capitalism, circular economy, and cradle-to-cradle design provide conceptual tools for reimagining business models that regenerate rather than deplete natural and social capital.

The integration of sustainability competencies into entrepreneurship education represents a fundamental pedagogical challenge. Laasch and Conaway (2015) identify

several core competencies essential for green entrepreneurs, including systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, normative thinking, strategic thinking, and interpersonal competencies. Systems thinking enables entrepreneurs to understand complex environmental and social systems, recognizing feedback loops, unintended consequences, and leverage points for intervention. Anticipatory thinking involves envisioning sustainable futures and developing strategies to navigate uncertainty and long-term environmental changes. These competencies require educational approaches that transcend traditional lecture-based instruction, emphasizing experiential learning, case-based analysis, and real-world problem-solving.

Opportunity recognition constitutes a central theoretical concern in green entrepreneurship education, as identifying environmentally and socially beneficial business opportunities requires distinctive cognitive capabilities and knowledge bases. Muñoz and Cohen (2018) argue that green opportunity recognition involves perceiving environmental problems as potential sources of entrepreneurial value creation, a process shaped by prior knowledge, social networks, and cognitive frameworks. Educating students to recognize green opportunities requires developing environmental awareness, exposing students to sustainability challenges across sectors and geographies, and cultivating creative problem-solving skills. Furthermore, educators must help students understand market failures, regulatory contexts, and stakeholder expectations that shape the viability of green business ventures.

The stakeholder theory provides a crucial theoretical foundation for green entrepreneurship education, emphasizing entrepreneurs' responsibilities to multiple constituencies beyond shareholders. Painter-Morland et al. (2016) note that stakeholder engagement is particularly complex in green entrepreneurship, where ventures must balance the interests of investors, customers, employees, communities, and future generations while addressing environmental concerns. Educational programs must prepare students to identify relevant stakeholders, understand their diverse interests and values, and develop governance mechanisms that ensure accountability and transparency. This stakeholder orientation fundamentally challenges shareholder primacy models that have dominated traditional business education, requiring students to reconceptualize the purpose and responsibilities of entrepreneurial ventures.

Innovative Pedagogical Strategies for Sustainability Integration

Experiential learning methodologies have emerged as particularly effective approaches for integrating sustainability into entrepreneurship education, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world environmental and social challenges. Leal Filho et al. (2021) demonstrate that project-based learning, service-learning, and entrepreneurial incubators focused on sustainability provide valuable opportunities for students to develop green ventures while contributing to community needs. These experiential approaches foster

deeper understanding of sustainability complexities, enhance problem-solving capabilities, and build confidence in students' abilities to create positive environmental and social impact. Moreover, experiential learning facilitates the development of tacit knowledge and entrepreneurial skills that are difficult to convey through traditional classroom instruction.

Interdisciplinary collaboration represents another critical pedagogical strategy for green entrepreneurship education, reflecting the inherently cross-cutting nature of sustainability challenges. Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) emphasize that effective green entrepreneurship requires integrating knowledge from diverse fields including environmental science, engineering, social sciences, and business disciplines. Educational programs that facilitate collaboration across disciplinary boundaries enable students to develop holistic perspectives on sustainability problems and solutions. Team-based projects involving students from different academic backgrounds can simulate the collaborative dynamics of real-world green ventures, which typically require diverse expertise to address technical, market, regulatory, and social dimensions of sustainability.

Case-based learning utilizing exemplary green enterprises and sustainability challenges provides valuable pedagogical tools for developing analytical and decision-making capabilities. Laasch and Conaway (2015) argue that carefully selected cases can illustrate the complexity of sustainability trade-offs, the diversity of green business models, and the contextual factors influencing venture success. Cases examining both successful green ventures and sustainability failures enable students to critically analyze entrepreneurial strategies, identify success factors and pitfalls, and develop informed judgments about sustainable business practices. Furthermore, case discussions can foster ethical reflection by prompting students to consider the normative dimensions of entrepreneurial decisions and their consequences for various stakeholders and the environment.

Technology-enhanced learning and digital tools offer expanding opportunities for sustainability education, enabling access to real-time environmental data, simulation tools, and global collaboration platforms. Muñoz and Cohen (2018) highlight the potential of digital technologies to enhance environmental literacy, facilitate life-cycle assessments, and connect students with green entrepreneurship ecosystems worldwide. Virtual reality and simulation tools can help students visualize environmental impacts, experiment with circular economy principles, and test green business models in risk-free environments. Additionally, online platforms enable collaboration with international partners, exposure to diverse sustainability contexts, and access to expertise that may not be available locally, thereby enriching the educational experience and fostering global perspectives on sustainability challenges.

Ethical Frameworks and Responsible Leadership Development

Ethical business education for green entrepreneurship must address fundamental questions about the purpose of business, entrepreneurial responsibilities, and the relationship between profit and social good. Painter-Morland et al. (2016) argue that developing ethical sensitivity requires moving beyond rule-based ethics to cultivate moral imagination and practical wisdom among future entrepreneurs. This involves engaging students in critical reflection on their values, examining ethical dilemmas inherent in sustainability contexts, and developing capacities for ethical reasoning in ambiguous situations. Green entrepreneurship presents distinctive ethical challenges, including intergenerational justice concerns, uncertainty about environmental impacts, and tensions between growth imperatives and ecological limits, which demand sophisticated ethical frameworks and deliberative capabilities.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and shared value creation frameworks provide important conceptual tools for understanding how businesses can contribute to sustainable development while maintaining economic viability. Leal Filho et al. (2021) demonstrate that integrating CSR principles into entrepreneurship education helps students recognize that sustainable practices can enhance competitive advantage, build stakeholder trust, and create long-term value. The shared value concept, which emphasizes creating economic value in ways that simultaneously address social and environmental needs, offers a compelling framework for green entrepreneurship. However, educators must also critically examine limitations and critiques of these frameworks, including concerns about greenwashing, the adequacy of voluntary approaches, and structural barriers to fundamental sustainability transformation.

Leadership development for sustainability requires cultivating distinctive leadership qualities including visionary thinking, collaborative skills, resilience, and commitment to long-term sustainability goals. Laasch and Conaway (2015) identify servant leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership as particularly relevant models for green entrepreneurship, emphasizing leaders' responsibilities to inspire and empower others toward sustainability objectives. Educational programs should provide opportunities for students to develop these leadership capabilities through mentoring relationships, leadership roles in sustainability projects, and reflection on their leadership experiences and development. Furthermore, sustainability leadership education must address the emotional and psychological dimensions of environmental challenges, helping students develop resilience and hope despite the daunting nature of sustainability problems.

Institutional change and systemic transformation represent ultimate objectives of ethical business education for sustainability (Mulyana et al., 2021), requiring entrepreneurs who can challenge unsustainable business practices and institutional structures. Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) emphasize that green entrepreneurs often function as institutional entrepreneurs, developing innovative practices that challenge existing norms and create new

pathways for sustainable development. Preparing students for this transformative role requires developing critical perspectives on existing business paradigms, understanding institutional dynamics and change processes, and cultivating courage to pursue sustainability visions despite resistance and uncertainty. Educational institutions themselves must model the values and practices they espouse, demonstrating institutional commitment to sustainability through campus operations, governance practices, and community engagement, thereby creating authentic learning environments that reinforce educational messages.

CONCLUSION

Reimagining business education for green entrepreneurship represents an essential response to contemporary sustainability imperatives and offers promising pathways toward sustainable global communities. This article has demonstrated that effective green entrepreneurship education requires theoretical foundations that integrate sustainability principles with entrepreneurship theory, innovative pedagogical strategies emphasizing experiential and interdisciplinary learning, and ethical frameworks that cultivate responsible leadership and transformative capabilities. The synthesis of recent scholarly literature reveals growing consensus that business education must fundamentally evolve beyond narrow profit-maximization orientations to prepare entrepreneurs capable of creating ventures that regenerate environmental and social systems while maintaining economic viability. Educational institutions bear crucial responsibilities for this transformation, requiring institutional commitment, curriculum innovation, pedagogical experimentation, and authentic modeling of sustainability values. As global communities confront escalating environmental crises and social challenges, the development of ethically grounded green entrepreneurs through transformed business education becomes not merely desirable but imperative for creating a sustainable and just future. Future research should examine the long-term impacts of sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship education, identify best practices across diverse institutional contexts, and explore how educational interventions can most effectively foster the systemic changes necessary for global sustainability transformation.

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