



Article

The Role of Universities in Achieving Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The study revealed that Al Ain University's role in promoting sustainable development is viewed as moderate by participants, with an average rating of 3.55, highlighting the university's important role in balancing economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection through its focus on education, scientific research, and community service. It also emphasized the university's potential to implement sustainable practices on campus, such as using renewable energy and improving waste management, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among students and staff. In terms of strengthening this role, participants showed strong consensus, with an average rating of 3.72, underscoring the need for educational programs that raise awareness of sustainable development and encourage community participation through research and sustainable practices. The study found no significant gender-based differences in the assessment, reflecting a balanced view among both males and females. Based on these findings, the research recommended updating the curriculum to include topics like climate change, renewable energy, and the green economy, as well as offering courses focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, it called for strengthening cooperation with government and private sectors and adopting sustainability policies within the university, including using solar energy and improving waste management.

Keywords: *Sustainability, social environment, university, renewable energy, community service.*

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Introduction

Development aims to meet the current and future needs of individuals, with numerous resources and wealth used to achieve integrated development in our societies. However, these resources are increasingly depleting because they are non-renewable, particularly water resources, energy, and raw materials, which are consumed excessively on a global scale. Despite the prevailing view that the Earth is an inexhaustible source of resources and energy, many environmental risks threaten its sustainability (Tahon, 2022).

Sustainable development is a concept associated with economic and social aspects, globally recognized by the United Nations. The UN uses it to create a roadmap for environmental, economic, and social development across the world. Its primary aim is to raise living standards for all individuals in societies while developing tools, methods, and productive strategies that do not deplete natural resources or burden the environment, ensuring the continued availability of resources for future generations (Al-Qudra, 2020).

Sustainable development is concerned with optimizing the use of available resources to meet human needs while protecting the rights of future generations. This goal is essential to address environmental challenges, including pollution and ecological degradation, which countries worldwide must mitigate (Abdul Rashid, 2021). Universities play a vital role in raising awareness of development issues, equipping individuals for the labor market in various fields, improving productivity and performance, and promoting research, innovation, and progress (Al-Lubedi, 2015).

Al-Ain University, known for its commitment to sustainability, ranks 5th globally in sustainable development according to the QS World University Rankings for 2024 (Al-Shamsi, 2024).

The importance of this study lies in exploring the role of universities in achieving sustainable development, providing suggestions to decision-makers, especially at Al-Ain University, to enhance their role in sustainability. The study offers a research tool—the sustainable development questionnaire—that can be utilized in other universities and studies

Problem

Sustainable development links current and future generations by ensuring access to resources and necessities without compromising the environment's ability to support future generations. This process involves fair distribution of resources, reducing disparities between advanced and developing societies, and promoting social justice, economic growth, and environmental protection (Al-Temimi, 2022).

Objectives

1. Identify the role of Al-Ain University in achieving sustainable development.
2. Suggest strategies to enhance the role of Al-Ain University in sustainability.
3. Explore whether gender affects perceptions of the university's role in sustainable development.

Questions

The study answers the following questions:

1. What is the role of Al-Ain University in achieving sustainable development?
2. What suggestions can enhance Al-Ain University's role in sustainability?

Hypothesis. H0: : There is no statistically significant effect of gender (male, female) on the role of Al-Ain University in achieving sustainable development.

Literature review

This section reviews relevant studies, starting with recent Arab and international research. Notable studies explore the role of universities in sustainability, ranging from "green universities" and digital transformation to environmental awareness and sustainable development in various educational systems globally. These studies emphasize the importance of education, research, and community engagement in advancing sustainability goals.

Sabih (2022) aimed to explore mechanisms for transforming Egyptian universities into green institutions. Using a comparative analysis approach, the study analyzed a sample of 19 Egyptian universities. The findings revealed several green university practices, including the promotion of sustainable activities through green pathways, education, scientific research, and active participation in raising environmental awareness among students and graduates. The study recommended the broader dissemination of the green university concept, the adoption of global green university rankings, and the organization of sustainability-related training programs to foster a green-oriented society.

Al-Hasbi (2022) examined the relationship between digital transformation and sustainable development, particularly focusing on the role of higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic at Libyan universities. A descriptive approach was used with a sample of 87 students. The study revealed a significant negative perception towards digital transformation, attributed to limited implementation of e-learning systems. It called for a comprehensive digital planning strategy that addresses both practical and knowledge-based needs to enhance educational and training processes. Al-Otaibi (2022) investigated the role of Saudi universities in raising environmental awareness among students and evaluated their understanding of sustainable development. Using descriptive and

correlational survey methods, the study sampled 384 students. The results highlighted the critical role universities play in promoting awareness, which should be further supported by faculty members and integrated into student activities and curricula. The study recommended the organization of awareness campaigns, training sessions, and conferences on sustainability to improve climate literacy among students.

Khalif (2021) examined the role of blended learning in sustainable development from the perspectives of faculty members. The descriptive method was used with a sample of 130 faculty members. The findings revealed significant differences in responses, with blended learning being favored in applied colleges for its contribution to sustainable development. The study emphasized the importance of incorporating blended learning into educational systems due to its pivotal role in achieving sustainability goals. Abu Ayada (2021) aimed to develop an integrated vision for addressing the barriers to integrating sustainable development practices. Using an analytical approach with a sample of 33 students, the study found that contemporary development depends on the availability of qualified resources to advance nations. It recommended developing effective plans and empowering qualified personnel to contribute to national development.

Bahjat (2020) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial education and sustainable development within universities. A descriptive approach was employed on a sample of 150 faculty members. The results underscored the need for improvements in university management, leadership culture, and curriculum development to better support sustainable development. The study recommended empowering capable personnel to drive national development through strategic planning. Abdelkader (2020) proposed a strategic framework to enhance sustainable development culture among Egyptian university students, covering environmental, economic, social, and technological aspects. Using a descriptive survey method, the study sampled 31 members. The results indicated moderate levels of sustainable development in economic, environmental, and social domains, but higher levels of practical application. The study stressed the necessity of implementing effective strategies to promote sustainable development across all sectors. Al-Shity (2020) This research examined the role of Saudi universities in aligning higher education outcomes with the requirements of sustainable development. An analytical descriptive method was applied on a sample of 80 administrative leaders. The results indicated a consensus on the importance of graduate quality and training programs for meeting societal and institutional needs. The study recommended increasing awareness of the significance of sustainable development and its long-term implications.

Safaa Abdel-Hakim (2020) Investigated the role of Yemeni universities in sustainable development, this study proposed a model to enhance their contributions. An analytical descriptive method was used with a sample of 45 students. The findings emphasized the importance of a green economy in addressing economic, environmental, and social challenges. The study recommended expanding green economy education and promoting environmentally sustainable practices. Ali Al-Kameem (2020) proposed a framework to improve the functions of Yemeni universities in various sectors to support sustainable development. Utilizing an analytical and field approach with 78 students, the study found that current university practices were routine and lacked community service and research contributions. The study recommended fostering an entrepreneurial culture and integrating climate education into curricula.

Khamaisa (2020) explored the contributions of higher education programs in Jordanian universities to scientific research for sustainable development. A descriptive approach was employed with a sample of 302 faculty members. The findings showed moderate involvement of higher education programs in achieving sustainability goals. The study recommended training faculty members on the importance of sustainable development and organizing workshops and conferences to improve research contributions.

Eid (2019) assessed the role of student activities in achieving sustainable development goals at Fayoum University. Using an analytical descriptive method on a sample of 372 students, the results emphasized the need for practical components in curricula and activities. The study recommended enhancing research and encouraging sustainability-focused student activities. Abdel-Mawla (2019) investigated the role of educational research at Aswan University in supporting sustainable development in Egypt. An analytical descriptive method was used on 59 doctoral and master's theses. The study found that economic, social, and environmental aspects were prioritized, while scientific research and innovation were less emphasized. It recommended revising curricula to better align with labor market demands and sustainability goals.

Mahfouz (2018) examined the impact on higher education. Using an analytical descriptive method with a sample of 178 students, the study highlighted the need to improve administrative systems to align with quality standards. It stressed the importance of providing adequate human and material resources to achieve sustainability. Al-Dosari (2017) analyzed the role of community service programs and continuing education in Saudi universities. Using a survey method on a sample of 211 faculty members and 32 deans and vice-deans, the results showed moderate contributions to sustainability needs. The study recommended developing programs that promote intellectual freedom, career development, and youth awareness about sustainability. Muna (2022) investigated strategies to transform Malaysia's GJU

into a sustainable green university. A descriptive approach was employed with a sample of 56 universities. The results demonstrated the potential to recycle 103 tons of waste annually into compost. The study recommended reducing paper and plastic consumption, as well as implementing double-sided printing and on-demand printing policies.

Cristina (2021) examined the role of universities in addressing societal challenges through a case study of 23 universities. The findings emphasized community engagement as foundational to sustainable development. The study recommended fostering student projects, cultural activities, and diverse councils to enhance regional collaboration. Ruzena (2019) analyzed environmental management systems in Slovakian universities using an analytical descriptive method on 40 universities. The study identified essential sustainability standards and recommended adopting green university strategies, along with integrating environmental management systems. Valerity (2019) explored challenges and solutions at Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University. Using an analytical descriptive method, the study highlighted the need for improved quality of life through regional collaboration and social engagement. It stressed the importance of working with nonprofit organizations to drive change.

Vivian (2019) examined sustainable leadership and its role in supporting educational transformation. Using case studies and narrative analysis on 66 cases, the study emphasized the need for courageous, well-cultured leadership. It recommended modernizing leadership frameworks and policies to support sustainable education systems. Finally Rebeca (2017) investigated the role of dual-strategy approaches in achieving sustainable development at Vinculación University. Using an analytical descriptive method with 21 faculty members, the results emphasized the importance of planning and aligning resources with educational and research contexts. The study recommended motivating communities to adopt sustainable development strategies across various sectors.

Methodology

Sample and Sampling

The study adopts a descriptive research approach, aiming to describe phenomena accurately without intervening or manipulating variables. The study sample consists of 70 students randomly selected from a population of 5,000 students at Al-Ain University for the academic year 2024/2025.

Table 1

Distribution of Study Sample Members According to Personal Variables

Variable	Category	Sample Size	Percentage
Gender	Male	45	64.3%
	Female	25	35.7%
	Total	70	100%
Age	20 - 30 years	18	25.7%

Variable	Category	Sample Size	Percentage
Marital Status	31 - 40 years	30	42.8%
	41 - 50 years	12	17.2%
	51 and above	10	14.3%
	Total	70	100%
	Single	10	14.3%
	Married	40	57.1%
	Divorced	11	15.7%
Employment Status	Widowed	9	12.9%
	Total	70	100%
	Government Sector	35	50%
	Private Sector	25	35.7%
Income Level	Freelance	10	14.3%
	Total	70	100%
	Less than 6,000 AED	9	12.8%
	7,000 - 13,000 AED	41	58.6%
	More than 14,000 AED	20	28.6%
	Total	70	100%

As shown in Table 1, the study sample consists of 45 male students (64.3%) and 25 female students (35.7%). The largest age group is between 31-40 years (42.8%), while the smallest group is aged 51 and above (14.3%). Regarding marital status, the majority of the participants are married (57.1%), while the smallest group consists of widowed individuals (12.9%). As for employment status, the highest percentage is from those employed in the government sector (50%), followed by those in the private sector (35.7%). The smallest group comprises those engaged in freelance work (14.3%). Lastly, the income level shows that most participants fall within the 7,000 - 13,000 AED category (58.6%), with the lowest percentage in the less than 6,000 AED category (12.8%). This distribution reflects the socio-demographic variety of the sample and provides insights into the study's diversity based on personal and economic variables.

Instrument

The current study relied on a questionnaire composed of two sections: Section 1: This section addressed the demographic characteristics of the study sample, including variables such as gender, age, educational status, employment status, monthly income, and family size. Section 2: This section consisted of items aimed at answering the study's research questions and achieving its objectives. It contained 9 items, distributed across two axes: The first one included 5 items as: (1)The university is concerned with organizing seminars and studies for the benefit of the environment and pollution prevention. (2)The university curriculum is aligned with contemporary requirements and changes (adapted to sustainable development. (3)The university focuses on continuous training for staff, providing opportunities for benefiting from expertise, and enhancing knowledge and skills. (4)The

university sets clear and specific goals to achieve sustainable development. (5)The university implements a clear policy to activate scientific research that best addresses community needs. The second includes 5 items as: (1) Integrating new curricula aligned with the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. (2) Coordinating between the university and official bodies to select topics for academic research that benefit sustainable development. (3) Increasing seminars, forums, and conferences focused on sustainable development, especially environmental development. (4) Strengthening scientific research that provides significant benefit to the community. (5) Training and qualifying faculty members and improving their academic levels to contribute to sustainable development.

To verify the content validity of the tool, the initial version of the questionnaire was presented to the supervisor for feedback. The supervisor evaluated the clarity of the items, their linguistic structure, and their relevance to the field of study. Any suggested amendments or observations were incorporated to improve the questionnaire's suitability for the research context. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire and ensure its internal consistency, the Cronbach's Alpha formula (α) was used, as indicated in Table 2. This method provides a measure of the degree to which the items within the questionnaire are consistent in measuring the same underlying construct.

Table 2
Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire

Tool	Internal Consistency Reliability
Questionnaire	0.92

It can be observed from Table (2) that the value of the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire is 0.92. This value indicates the quality of the scale's construction and its suitability for the purposes of this study. In order to make judgements on the means of the study tool, its sections, and the related items, the response levels were determined based on the five-point Likert scale, which was calculated as follows: The category length is calculated as:

Results

Results of the First Question: What is the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development?

To answer the first question, the mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development. Table (3) below shows the results.

Table 3
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Statements Related to the Role of Al Ain University in Achieving Sustainable Development

Rank	T	Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Degree
1	3	The university provides specialized scientific courses for sectors related to environmental protection.	3.88	0.73	High
2	2	The university adopts plans and programmes that contribute to reducing the problem of environmental pollution.	3.70	0.98	High
3	4	The university collaborates with various community sectors to find ways to preserve and protect the environment.	3.47	1.51	Moderate
4	1	The university preserves all available resources and uses them wisely to achieve sustainable development.	3.40	1.71	Moderate
5	5	The university encourages conducting scientific research related to the environment and its protection.	3.33	1.51	Moderate
Overall Degree	-	-	3.55	0.968	Moderate

In this table, the mean scores reflect the participants' evaluation of Al Ain University's role in sustainable development. The first and second statements received higher ratings, indicating that the university's efforts in providing specialized courses and implementing environmental protection plans are regarded positively. However, statements regarding collaboration with community sectors and conducting scientific research received moderate ratings, suggesting there may be room for further improvement in these areas. The overall degree of the university's role in achieving sustainable development is considered "Moderate," with an average mean score of 3.55.

Results of second question: What Are the Suggestions for Enhancing the Role of Al Ain University in Achieving Sustainable Development?

To answer the second question, the mean scores and standard deviations of the suggestions for enhancing the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development were calculated. Table (4) presents this data.

Table 4

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Suggestions to Enhance the Role of Al Ain University in Achieving Sustainable Development

Rank	T	Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Degree
1	3	Encouraging researchers and students to conduct research in sustainable development.	4.06	0.92	High
2	4	Organizing training courses to raise awareness about sustainable development.	4.00	0.98	High
3	2	Linking the university's faculties with various sectors of society.	3.53	1.53	Moderate

Rank	T	Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Degree
4	1	Ensuring that sustainable development is included as a general course for students.	3.30	1.40	Moderate

It appears from Table (4) that the mean scores for the study sample's ratings on the statements regarding suggestions to activate the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development were overall 3.72, with a high rating. The individual mean scores ranged between 3.30 and 4.06. According to the table, two statements received a high rating: Statement (3), which states: "Encouraging researchers and students to conduct research in sustainable development," with a mean score of 4.06 and a high rating, and Statement (4), which states: "Organizing training courses to raise awareness about sustainable development," with a mean score of 4.00 and a high rating. The remaining statements received a moderate rating, with their mean scores ranging from 3.30 to 3.53. The highest mean score was for Statement (2), which states: "Linking the university's faculties with various sectors of society," with a mean score of 3.53, while the lowest mean score was for Statement (1), which states: "Ensuring that sustainable development is included as a general course for students," with a mean score of 3.30.

Results of the Hypothesis of the Study: There is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development attributed to the gender variable (Male, Female).

To test this hypothesis, the relationship between the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development and the gender variable (Male, Female) was examined. The study used the "t-test" to identify differences between the two groups.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value to Identify the Differences in the Responses of the Study Sample Regarding the Role of Al Ain University in Achieving Sustainable Development Attributed to the Gender Variable (Male, Female)

Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	Significance Level
Male	45	3.63	0.63	0.127	0.639
Female	25	3.40	0.59		

It can be seen from the above table that the significance level (0.639 = sig) is greater than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. It is evident that there is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) regarding the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development. This explanation demonstrates that there was no significant difference between males and females in their views on the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development, based on the results of the t-test and the significance value attributed to the gender variable (Male, Female).

Discussion

Discussion the First Question results: The results showed that the mean scores for the study sample's estimates of the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development were 3.55, which is considered moderate. This result is attributed to the fact that universities, including Al Ain University, are one of the key pillars for achieving sustainable development in societies. They play multiple roles, including education, scientific research, and community service. Thanks to its academic and scientific capabilities, the university can act as a main driver in achieving a balance between economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection. Universities serve as key platforms for scientific research aimed at finding practical and sustainable solutions to global challenges such as climate change, water and energy scarcity, and food security. Through developing innovative technologies and evidence-based policies, universities can make effective contributions to supporting long-term sustainability. This result is also attributed to the fact that universities can set an example in adopting sustainable practices by using renewable energy sources to operate the campus, improving waste management, and promoting a culture of environmental responsibility among students and staff.

This result aligns with the findings of previous studies, such as the study by Sabih (2022), Al-Hasabi (2022), and Al-Otaibi (2022), which confirmed that universities play a central role in achieving sustainable development through education, research, and community service. By facing challenges and collaborating with various sectors, universities can become effective partners in building a sustainable future for the coming generations. Investing in higher education and enhancing its role in achieving sustainability goals is not an option but a necessity for the desired progress.

Discussion the Second Question results: The results showed that the mean scores for the study sample's estimates of the suggestions to activate the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development were 3.72, which is considered high. This result is attributed to the importance of sustainable development, which is a comprehensive approach aimed at achieving a balance between the economic, social, and environmental needs of both current and future generations. Sustainable development has become one of the most prominent concepts that have gained increasing importance in recent decades, due to challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social gaps.

This result aligns with the findings of the studies by Al-Otaibi (2022), Khalif (2021), and Abu Ayada (2021), which highlighted the importance of universities as key institutions that contribute to shaping societies and building a sustainable future. Through education, scientific research, and community service, universities play an important role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and raising awareness about them. Universities also offer curricula and educational programs that focus on sustainability, such as environmental resource management, renewable energy, and the green economy.

Discussion the Hypothesis results: The results showed that there is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development attributed to

the gender variable (Male, Female). This result indicates that both males and females have a similar perspective regarding the role of Al Ain University in achieving sustainable development, and there are no significant differences between them. The result suggests that the efforts made by the university in achieving sustainable development are evaluated similarly by both genders, reflecting that the university's programs and activities are not biased towards any specific gender. Also the result is consistent with the findings of the studies by Sabih (2022), Al-Otaibi (2022), Khalif (2021), and Abu Ayada (2021), which showed no significant differences between males and females in their evaluation of Al Ain University's role in sustainable development. This indicates that the university's programs and activities are received equally by both genders.

Conclusion

The study's findings revealed that the role of Al Ain University in promoting sustainable development is perceived moderately by the sample participants, with an average rating of 3.55. This suggests that the University plays a crucial role in balancing economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection through its focus on education, scientific research, and community service. Additionally, the study highlighted the University's potential to adopt sustainable practices on campus, such as utilizing renewable energy and improving waste management systems, which fosters a culture of environmental responsibility among students and staff. These findings align with several previous studies that emphasize the pivotal role of universities in advancing sustainable development.

Regarding the proposals for enhancing the University's role in sustainable development, the results indicated strong consensus among respondents on the importance of strengthening this role, with a high average score of 3.72. There was a clear emphasis on the need to develop educational programs that raise awareness of sustainable development and encourage community involvement through sustainable research and practices. Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant gender-based differences in the assessment of the University's role, indicating that both males and females evaluate the University's contributions to sustainable development similarly. This reflects a balanced response to the efforts made by the University in this field.

Based on the study's findings, the research proposes several key recommendations to strengthen Al Ain University's role in advancing sustainable development. These include updating curricula to incorporate critical topics related to sustainable development, such as climate change, renewable energy, the green economy, and social justice, along with offering specialized courses focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study also suggests promoting research projects aimed at addressing local environmental and social issues and establishing dedicated research centres in areas like natural resource management, water conservation, and renewable energy. Moreover, enhancing collaboration with both government and private sectors is essential to support sustainable initiatives, as well as launching community-based programs such as environmental awareness campaigns and sustainable agriculture projects.

Additionally, the research advocates for the adoption of sustainability policies within the university, such as utilizing solar energy, reducing water and electricity consumption, and improving waste management through

recycling initiatives. The university should also encourage students to create start-up ventures based on green economy principles and organize innovation competitions to develop sustainable solutions for environmental and social challenges. Furthermore, the study recommends offering training courses and workshops for the local community on topics like sustainable agriculture and resource management, while also developing professional development programs to enhance skills in the field of sustainable development.

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