

Article

## Sustainability Policies and Social Inequality: Evidence from University Students in Indonesia

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Safera Soraida

Sociology Study Program, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study examines how sustainability policies can alleviate social inequality considering the views of university students in Indonesia. Over the last few years, sustainability has become a prominent feature of strategies of national development meant to facilitate an inclusive growth and social justice. Despite these efforts, social inequality is still a major problem in most developing societies. Using the Social Justice Theory and especially the distributive fairness as conceptualised by Rawls, this research paper will explore the role of sustainability policies in alleviating perceived social inequalities among the youth. The research follows a descriptive research design using a survey method. The structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 150 students of the University of Indonesia. The results show that the level of awareness about the national sustainability policies among the students is moderate, and their perception of the role of these policies in mitigating social inequality is rather high. It is also shown in the results that the most notable challenges are associated with the lack of a bridge between policy development and its actual implementation, and the lack of awareness of sustainability efforts by the population. Moreover, the statistical analysis indicates that there are no significant differences regarding the perceptions of students depending on their gender. The research finds that sustainability policies can contribute to social equity with an effective implementation mechanism, engagement of the people, and inclusive governance. It suggests reinforcing sustainability education within the universities, enhancing youth engagement in sustainability programs, and enhance monitoring systems of policies in order to maximize their contribution to the social justice.

**Keywords:** *Sustainability policies, social inequality, social justice, sustainable development, university students*

## **Introduction**

Sustainability stands out as one of the most essential frameworks for development strategies in the world in the twenty-first century (Sands, 2023; Hariram et al., 2023). It has become apparent to governments and international organizations that sustainable development does not only focus on environmental protection but also includes economic prosperity and social equity (Kumar et al., 2024; Ahmad, 2024). The fusion of these dimensions indicates the essence of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 10 whose aim is to reduce inequalities both between societies and within each society.

Social inequality is a major challenge of most regions around the world particularly in the developing and emerging economies (Chamba & Chazireni, 2023; Lundahl et al., 2024). Inequality is of various types, such as inequality in income distribution, access to education, job opportunities, health services, and social involvement (Warwick-Booth, 2022; Lee, 2023). These inequalities tend to inhibit the inclusive growth, and may lead to social disintegration and financial instability (Van Niekerk, 2020). Therefore, the reduction of inequality has become one of the priorities of modern policies.

Sustainable policies have also been considered as a tool of addressing structural inequalities in societies (Dumitrescu-Popa, 2024). Such policies aim to strike a balance between economic growth and social justice by ensuring a large portion of the population can access resources and enjoy long-term social well-being (Büch, 2024; Din et al., 2023). Different sustainability programs entailing increased access to education, vulnerable communities, and enhanced social protection systems have been introduced by governments (Winston, 2024). Nonetheless, the success of these policies tends to be different based on how they are implemented, the capacity of the institution and the participation of the populace.

Indonesia provides an important context in which the interconnection between social inequality and sustainability policies can be studied (Telaumbanua, 2024; Arifin, 2024; Hadi et al., 2025; Satria, 2025). Being among the largest emerging economies of the southeast region, Indonesia has been adopting a number of national policies, which are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (Sugandi, 2022). The purpose of these strategies is inclusive development, alleviation of poverty, and access to social services (Bado, 2023). In spite of such attempts, the socioeconomic differences can be observed between regions and social classes, which is why the question of inequality can be regarded as a primary policy agenda.

University students represent a particularly suitable group to investigate the perception of sustainability and social justice. They are the future professionals and decision-makers, and their comprehension of

the sustainability policies and their possible influence on the social inequality can provide valuable insights into the social consequences of the policies in the larger scope. Universities are also good places where sustainability awareness can be raised and the young generation urged to be involved in social development projects.

This research paper is based on the Social Justice Theory, specifically, the work of John Rawls, and it analyses the role of sustainability policies in decreasing social inequality in the eyes of the university students. The framework presented by Rawls focuses on social and economic resources distribution and the significance of providing all society members with equal opportunities. Using such theoretical approach, the research undertaking aims at investigating the ways in which sustainability policies can be used as a tool to facilitate increased social justice.

In line with this, the current study examines the correlation between sustainability policies with the perceived social inequality among Indonesian university students. In particular, the research is expected to determine the level of awareness of sustainability policies on the part of students, their perceived effectiveness in eliminating social inequity, challenges pertinent to the implementation thereof, and how they can improve their social outcomes.

Besides discussion of sustainability policies at the policy level, empirical studies have been on the rise in how sustainability initiatives are associated with enhancing perceptions of social justice among the youthful population. The university students qualify to be a significant social group in this context since they are the upcoming professionals, policymakers and leaders in society. They may affect the way the society will interact with the sustainable development policies in the future (Shephard, 2015). Research reports that institutions of higher learning can significantly affect the perception of sustainability and social responsibility among students via education and campus programs/ schemes and community participation.

Studies carried out within the context of higher education institutions have revealed that students tend to express positive behaviours in as far as sustainability initiatives are concerned. Indicatively, Lozano et al. (2017) established that university sustainability programs play a significant role in making students concerned about their environmental and social issues. On the same note, Filho et al. (2019) underline the idea that sustainability education may reinforce the knowledge of students regarding social justice and inclusive development. These results imply that universities are major settings where sustainability awareness can be created and young people encouraged to take action with regard to alleviating social inequalities.

Moreover, recent research focuses on the correlation between sustainability education and the sense of equity in resource allocation. After exposure to curricula about sustainability, the students tend to become more supportive of the policies that determine how to alleviate poverty and inequality (Findler et al., 2019). This shows that sustainability consciousness among university students can affect their views of the role played by the public policies in promoting social justice and equitable development. Although a substantial amount of literature is available on sustainability and social inequality, several gaps remain. To begin with, most of the current literature emphasizes on environmental sustainability but with not so much emphasis on the social aspect of sustainability, specifically how sustainability policies can help overcome inequality. Second, other studies examine the sustainability policies at the national or institutional level with little focus on the perceptions of university students towards the same. Lastly, empirical investigations on the interaction between policies of sustainability and perceived social inequality in emerging economies are still quite limited. Thus, the research paper attempts to fill these gaps by investigating the perceptions of sustainability policies by university students and its possible contribution to eliminating social inequality. This research study can lead to the expanding body of literature in the topic of sustainability governance and social justice through the lens of the youth in the developing world.

### **Literature Review**

Sustainability has become a multidimensional concept in recent years and it is no longer viewed solely as an environmental agenda but rather a way of dealing with economic and social inequalities. According to scholars, sustainable development policies represent a major aspect of ensuring equity in resources and opportunities among societies. In this respect, the idea of sustainability initiatives can be associated with the overall aim of eliminating social inequality and promoting inclusive development (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016). Such policies aim at balancing the environmental protection quest with social justice by ensuring equitable development gains among the various social classes.

The inclusion of social equity in the policies of sustainability has been emphasized in a number of studies. As an example, Leach et al. (2018) believe that sustainability transitions should be based on justice and inclusiveness to ensure environmental changes do not serve to strengthen the social inequalities. Their work highlights that the sustainability strategies must consider structural inequalities through enhanced access to education, job opportunities as well as social services especially to the disadvantaged communities. In the same way, Biermann et al. (2022) observe that the sustainable

development governance must include the institutional arrangements that facilitate equitable participation and equal distribution of resources.

Besides discussion of sustainability policies at the policy level, empirical studies have been on the rise in how sustainability initiatives are associated with enhancing perceptions of social justice among the youthful population. The university students qualify to be a significant social group in this context since they are the upcoming professionals, policymakers and leaders in society. They may affect the way the society will interact with the sustainable development policies in the future (Shephard, 2015). Research reports that institutions of higher learning can significantly affect the perception of sustainability and social responsibility among students via education and campus programs/ schemes and community participation.

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### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand the relationship between sustainability policies and social inequality, it is important to have a clear theoretical understanding which explains the impact of public policies in determining how the opportunities and resources are distributed in society. The research is based predominantly on Social Justice Theory with specific reference to the works of John Rawls in an attempt to determine how policies that are directed towards sustainability can help in alleviation of social inequality.

The theory of justice proposed by Rawls is based on the concept of equity when it comes to allocating social and economic resources. Rawls (1971) considers a just society to be one in which institutions are designed to provide equal basic liberties to all individuals and to control social and economic inequalities in a way that favours the least advantaged individuals of the society. This view is also known as the difference principle whereby one may think that inequalities are justified provided they bring better conditions to the most underprivileged people.

In this light, sustainability policies can be conceptualised as institutional arrangements aimed at enhancing fair development and welfare. Some policies, when set in a proper way, are to achieve equitable access to basic resources such as education, medical facilities, jobs, and environmental benefits. Therefore, the sustainability programs can serve as the tool of distributive justice promotion in the present societies.

Within the framework of sustainable development, social justice is directly associated with notions of inclusive expansion and equal distribution of resources. Sustainability policies mostly focus on alleviating poverty, enhancing access to the social services, and mitigating structural inequalities, which are prevailing in marginalized communities. These goals coincide well with the theoretical framework that was developed by Rawls and that of social justice that upholds fairness, equal opportunity, and the responsibility of the institutions.

The current study can be applied using the theory of Rawls, which makes it possible to learn more about how sustainability policies can affect the perception of fairness and equality among the young population. University students are a socially conscious group that is usually interested in matters of sustainability, environmental protection and social justice. Their perceptions can hence be used to gain

a good understanding of the perceived effectiveness of sustainability policies in solving the social inequality.

Applying the Social Justice Theory to the analytical tool of the research, the study will explore the sustainability policies as the environmental initiatives, but also as the tools of social policies that can bring more equality and fairness to the society.

### **Conceptual Model**

This paper suggests a theoretical framework conceptual model based on the literature review which analyses the connection between sustainability policies and social inequality.

The model presupposes that sustainability policies are the independent variable whereas perceived social inequality is the dependent one. Another aspect that the framework takes into consideration is the role of demographic factors, including gender, as a possible factor that may affect the perception that students have towards sustainability policies and their effect on social equality.

The government policies in this model are those that are geared towards the achievement of sustainable development, social inclusion, fair distribution of resources, and future well-being of society. By doing these policies, it is likely to affect the view of fairness and equality among the individuals in society.

In this sense, the conceptual model presupposes that the higher the sustainability policies, the higher the social equality perceptions among the university students.

### **Research Hypotheses**

With the theoretical background of the Social Justice Theory and the literature that has been developed on the subject of sustainability and social inequality, this research is expected to propose a series of research hypotheses that explore the connection between sustainability policies and the views of social inequality among the university students.

From this perspective, stronger sustainability initiatives are expected to contribute to reducing perceived social inequality and improving social fairness within society.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1:** Sustainability policies have a significant effect on reducing perceived social inequality among university students.

**H2:** Students demonstrate a positive perception of sustainability policies aimed at promoting social equality.

**H3:** There are statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of sustainability policies and their role in reducing social inequality based on gender.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The research design to be used in this study is descriptive analytical research design as it aims to investigate the relationship between sustainability policies and social inequality in the view of the university students. The descriptive approach has been regarded as suitable when trying to discover social phenomena and studying the perception and attitudes of people towards public policies. Using this strategy, the research aims to establish the degree of awareness of students in matters of sustainability policies and to determine their perceived contribution towards alleviating social inequality.

The study is based on a quantitative survey method, where it is possible to collect and analyse the information about a specific number of respondents. The quantitative methods of research are especially applicable to the study of the relationships between variables and patterns in social attitudes and perceptions.

### Population and Sample

The proposed study population grouped of undergraduate students of the University of Indonesia 150 students of various academic fields were randomly selected to ensure that there were a variety of views and backgrounds. Both males and females were covered in the sample, and this allowed to investigate the possible differences in perceptions across genders. The sample size that has been selected is deemed to be adequate in order to conduct statistical analysis and also have adequate data to address the research questions of the study.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of the participants*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	68	45.3%
	Female	82	54.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Age	18–20 years	41	27.3%
	21–23 years	74	49.3%
	24–26 years	27	18.0%
	27 years and above	8	5.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Year of Study	First year	29	19.3%
	Second year	41	27.3%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Third year	45	30.0%
	Fourth year	35	23.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Monthly Family Income	Low	36	24.0%
	Middle	79	52.7%
	High	35	23.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

According to Table 1, the sample was fairly balanced in terms of gender with females slightly outnumbering males. The majority of the participants were aged 21 to 23, and the greatest subgroup was in the third year of study. Over 50 percent of the surveyed respondents indicated that they were part of a middle-income family, which means the sample represents different socioeconomic backgrounds.

### Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data that would measure the perception of students regarding the sustainability policies and how they can be used to mitigate the social inequality. The questionnaire had various subsections which covered the important variables of the research such as awareness of the sustainability policies, perception of their effectiveness in minimizing inequality and the challenges facing their enactment.

The measure of responses was based on a five-point Likert scale, that is, strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This scale enabled the participants to state the extent to which they concurred with the statements regarding the sustainability policies and social inequality.

The questionnaire questions were formulated according to the past literature on sustainability and social justice, and the theoretical knowledge based on the Social Justice Theory by Rawls. In order to achieve the relevance and readability of the questions in the questionnaire, the instrument was vetted by various academic researchers whose area of expertise is sociology and sustainable development. Moreover, pilot testing was done on a small sample of students in order to test the clearness of the questions and the appropriateness of the measurement scale.

The instrument was evaluated on the basis of the reliability of Cronbach's Alpha which showed that the instrument had a satisfactory internal consistency amongst the questionnaire items. This indicates that the instrument was suitable in the measurement of constructs under analysis in the study.

**Table 2***Internal Consistency Reliability of the Study Instrument*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Awareness of Sustainability Policies	5	0.81
Perceived Impact on Reducing Social Inequality	5	0.84
Challenges in Policy Implementation	5	0.79
Strategies for Enhancing Policy Effectiveness	5	0.83
<b>Overall Instrument</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0.87</b>

Table 2 states that the questionnaire showed acceptable to high internal consistency. The overall instrument had a co-efficient of 0.87 which is good in a social science research.

**Table 3***Likert Scale Interpretation*

<b>Mean Range</b>	<b>Level</b>
1.00–2.33	Low
2.34–3.67	Moderate
3.68–5.00	High

**Data Analysis**

Data obtained was analysed in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics to show the perception of sustainability policies by students and the perceived effects of these policies on social inequality.

Also independent samples t-tests were done to determine the existence of statistically significant differences in the perceptions of male and female students towards sustainability policies and social inequality.

The SPSS software applied all statistical analyses and the significance level was established at 0.05 and it is a commonly established level of significance in the social science studies.

**Results**

The current section provides a statistical analysis of the data obtained among students at the University of Indonesia. It will analyse students' perceptions towards the sustainability policies and how they can help decrease the social inequality. The responses were analysed with the help of descriptive statistics and means and standard deviations as well as the inferential analysis to investigate possible gender differences.

**Awareness of Sustainability Policies by the students**

The first dimension focused on the awareness of students on the sustainability policies and initiatives that were to be taken towards the encouragement of sustainable development and social justice.

**Table 4**  
*Students' Awareness of Sustainability Policies*

Item	Mean	SD	Level
I am familiar with the concept of sustainability in public policy.	3.92	0.81	High
I am aware of national sustainability initiatives in Indonesia.	3.58	0.93	Moderate
I believe sustainability policies are linked to social justice.	3.84	0.77	High
My university provides adequate information about sustainability policies.	3.41	0.98	Moderate
Sustainability policies are important for long-term social development.	4.05	0.74	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 4 indicates that students demonstrate a generally high level of awareness of sustainability policies. The the highest mean was recorded for the item related to the majority of sustainability policies as to the social development in the long term, but the minimum mean was related to the university-level offers of information about sustainability policies.

The findings show that the awareness of sustainability policies is moderate to rather high among the students. The general average score in this dimension indicates that the vast majority of students have heard about the general idea of sustainability and understand its relevance in solving the problems of the society.

Some of the statements involving sustainability awareness also scored fairly well in terms of means. Specifically, the students showed a strong agreement that sustainability policies are the key to the long-term social development and the improvement in the quality of life of the future generation. Students also agreed with the statements that governments should use sustainability strategies that will lead to inclusive development and social welfare.

Nevertheless, there has been some lower mean scores of certain items especially those associated with the knowledge of students on certain sustainability policies which are applied at the national level. This implies that, although students are fairly familiar with the notion of sustainability, the level of their awareness of tangible policy initiatives might remain low.

On the whole, the findings imply that students of the university have a positive inclination to sustainability, but additional work might be required to make them more aware of particular policy processes.

#### **Perceived Effects of Sustainability Policies in minimizing Social Inequality**

The second dimension considered the perceptions of students on the role of sustainability policy in alleviating social inequality.

**Table 5***Results indicate that students perceive*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level</b>
Sustainability policies can improve equal access to education.	4.11	0.72	High
Sustainability initiatives can reduce economic disparities.	3.89	0.84	High
These policies promote fairness in access to public services.	3.78	0.80	High
Sustainability policies help support disadvantaged social groups.	3.95	0.76	High
Inclusive sustainability policies can strengthen social cohesion.	3.87	0.79	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.92</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 5 results indicate that the Students have perceived that the role played by sustainability policies in minimizing social inequality is high. The most congruent point was around the role of sustainability policies in offering equal access to education with all the points in this dimension rated high.

The discussion indicates that the students have overall positive views of sustainability policies in the reduction of social disparities in society. The average value of this dimension suggests that the students think that the sustainability efforts could help to enhance the social justice and increase opportunities available to the underprivileged groups.

The students responded to positive statements that sustainability policies can contribute to alleviating inequality through better access to education, enhancing social welfare services, and enhancing inclusive access to economic opportunities with a a high level of agreement. A large proportion of the respondents also concurred that sustainability programs influence governments to implement policies that can help bring about poverty and social exclusion.

Moreover, students also pointed out that social justice should be considered when formulating sustainability policies. Based on the responses, it may be that sustainability initiatives that simply concentrate on the environmental problems are not enough to deal with the wider range of social inequalities unless they are co-ordinated by policies that would aid in the fair allocation of resources and opportunities.

These results justify the claim that sustainability policies may be used as tools of social justice provided that they are structured in ways that encourage equitable and inclusive development.

### **Problems in the Sustainability Policy Implementation**

The third dimension introduced the perceptions of the students to the challenges in the application of the sustainability policies.

**Table 6**  
*Challenges in Implementing Sustainability Policies*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level</b>
There is a gap between policy design and implementation.	4.07	0.73	High
Public awareness of sustainability policies remains limited.	3.94	0.81	High
Resource distribution is not always equitable across groups.	3.76	0.88	High
Institutional coordination is insufficient for effective implementation.	3.69	0.86	High
Vulnerable groups may not fully benefit from sustainability initiatives.	3.72	0.83	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>High</b>

The results in table 6 indicate that students feel that there are significant challenges during implementation. The gap between policy formulation and practical implementation was ranked as the most important problem, and low public awareness.

The findings show that students observe a number of challenges that could impair the success of sustainability programs in the reduction of social inequality. Among the most commonly defined issues is the problem between policy development and real practice. Most of the students feel that the sustainability strategies may be most eloquently formulated at policy level but their application might be constrained by institutional and administrative factors.

The other critical issue that the respondents noted is the lack of knowledge and involvement of the people in sustainability activities. Students observed that the sustainability policies cannot be effective when the population is not properly informed about their aims and the outcomes that can be expected. In addition, the respondents mentioned the presence of economic differences and the unequal resource accessibility as the possible impediments to the successful execution of sustainability politics. Sustainability programs in societies with high socioeconomic disparities might not be successful because of lack of targeted social support programs to address the vulnerable groups.

On the whole, the findings indicate that although sustainability policies are generally viewed as advantageous, their success is highly reliant on the presence of good governance, involvement of the population and fair distribution of resources.

**Gender Differences in Students’ Perceptions**

An independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis that the perceptions of sustainability policies would vary depending on gender of the student.

**Table 7**  
*Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Policies*

Item	Mean	SD	Level
Universities should strengthen sustainability education.	4.18	0.69	High
Youth should be more involved in sustainability initiatives.	4.09	0.74	High
Policy monitoring and evaluation should be improved.	4.01	0.77	High
Public awareness campaigns should be expanded.	4.12	0.71	High
Sustainability policies should focus more on vulnerable groups.	3.96	0.79	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.07</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>High</b>

Table 7 shows that students strongly support several strategies. The greatest average was obtained in strengthening sustainability education in the universities after which the expansion of public awareness campaigns was obtained.

**Table 8**  
*Independent Samples t-test by Gender*

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Awareness of Sustainability Policies	Male	68	3.73	0.56	-0.61	0.544
	Female	82	3.79	0.52		
Perceived Impact on Reducing Social Inequality	Male	68	3.89	0.58	-0.74	0.461
	Female	82	3.94	0.55		
Challenges in Policy Implementation	Male	68	3.82	0.61	-0.37	0.711
	Female	82	3.85	0.57		
Strategies for Enhancing Effectiveness	Male	68	4.04	0.53	-0.68	0.498
	Female	82	4.09	0.49		

The scores in table 8 The t-test scores show that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in any dimension of the study as all the significance values were greater than 0.05.

The results show that the difference in the perceptions of male and female students does not reach the conventional level of significance (0.05). Mean scores between male and female students in the dimensions under study were not dissimilar and this implies that the two groups have similar perceptions towards the sustainability policies and their contribution towards dealing with social inequality.

These results indicate that gender is not a major variable that affects the students in terms of their views towards sustainability policies and their possible effect on alleviating social inequality.

The lack of statistically significant gender differences shows that the awareness and attitudes to sustainability and social justice are rather similar in the case of university students of both sexes.

### **Discussions**

The current research analysed how sustainability policies may reduce the perceived social inequality as viewed by the Indonesian university students. The results offer a number of valuable lessons about the awareness of sustainability initiatives among the students, their perception of the social impact of the said policies, and the challenges related to their implementation.

To begin with, the findings show that the students are relatively aware of the sustainability policies and relevant to social development. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents were aware of sustainability as a concept and understood its significance with respect to social development in the long run. The finding is consistent with the existing literature, which also highlights increased awareness about sustainability concerns among university students, in higher education institutions in particular, which facilitate the sustainability education process and social responsibility (Lozano et al., 2017; Findler et al., 2019). Universities are increasingly becoming important platforms where sustainability awareness can be created and students encouraged to participate in environmental and social issues.

Second, the findings indicated that students are highly convinced that policies regarding sustainability could help reduce social inequality. Respondents concurred that sustainability projects could enhance access to education, decrease economic inequalities, and help disadvantaged social groups as indicated in Table 5. Such findings are in line with earlier studies that indicate sustainability policies have the potential to foster inclusive development through enhancing the allocation of resources and opportunities in society (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016). In this light, sustainability projects are not meant to simply cover environmental protection but serve as ways of supporting social justice and fair development.

The results can also be interpreted through the lens of Social Justice Theory and the works of Rawls (1971). Rawls argues that that a just society must have institutions which will favour equitable distribution of opportunities and resources especially among the disadvantaged groups. Institutional policies that seek to enhance access to education, social and economic opportunities may hence be perceived as tools of distributive justice. The affirmative views of the students in this research indicate that sustainability policies are considered as the possible strategies that can facilitate fairness and social inclusion in society.

Third, the outcomes also indicated that there were a number of challenges connected with implementation of sustainability policies. According to the results students have cited the lack of alignment between policy formulation and implementation as one of the greatest challenges towards attaining the goals of sustainability. Limited social awareness and lack of institutional integration was also felt to be a major obstacle. This is aligned with the claims of Leach et al. (2018), who note that sustainability transitions are usually confronted by institutional and governance issues that can restrict their ability to curb structural inequalities. Sustainability policies, which are effectively designed, in most cases, cannot deliver their intended results whereby the implementation mechanisms are weak or the populace is insufficiently involved.

Besides, the findings indicated that strategies that are geared towards enhancing the performance of sustainability policies are highly endorsed by students. According to the results, the respondents feel that the universities must take a stronger role in sustainability education and that there should be more involvement of the youth in sustainability activities. The results are in line with past research that has detailed the significant role of institutions of higher learning in developing sustainability literacy and promoting civic engagement among students (Filho et al., 2019). The universities can play a role in influencing the perception of social justice and sustainable development by introducing the concept of sustainability to the academic programs and campus life.

Lastly, the findings revealed that male and female students do not have any statistically significant differences in their perceptions of sustainability policies and their contribution to the reduction of social inequality. The independent samples t-test revealed that there is no significant difference between gender and the attitude of students towards sustainability initiatives. The implication of this observation is that the concern on sustainability policies and their endorsement is widely shared among university students irrespective of their gender. These outcomes might be the indication of the growing popularization of sustainability-related values in the world of higher education in which male and female students can be exposed to the same educational setting and social discourses about sustainable development.

On the whole, these results of the study point to the increased awareness of sustainability policies by university students regarding the value of sustainability policies in creating social justice and decreasing inequality. Simultaneously, the findings also highlight how the effectiveness of such policies is also based not just on policy design, but also on their successful implementation, awareness of the population, and institutional support. Enhancement of sustainability education, involvement of youth

and better governance mechanisms can thus be a significant factor in contributing to the role of sustainability policies in promoting the social equity and inclusion in development.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the role of sustainability policies in reducing perceived social inequality among university students in Indonesia. The results indicate that students are generally highly aware of sustainability concepts and understand the relevance of sustainability policies in ensuring the promotion of long-term social development. It is also revealed that students think that sustainability initiatives may help decrease social inequality through enhancing educational accessibility, assisting disadvantaged social groups, and ensuring equity in the allocation of social resources.

The results further indicate that despite the positive perception towards sustainability policies, there are a number of challenges that could restrict the effectiveness of sustainability policies. Such drawbacks are the discrepancies between the policy development and the actual practice, and the lack of public awareness of the sustainability policies, and the lack of the institutional coordination. These challenges need to be addressed in order to make sure that the sustainability policies can attain social goals they are supposed to achieve.

Generally, the research proposes the idea that sustainability policies can lead to higher levels of social justice and inclusive development in case of good governance, institutional dedication, and citizen engagement. Universities have a significant role to play in helping to create awareness on sustainability and involving the youth in sustainability programs.

### **Implications**

This study has a number of theoretical and practical implications. In theoretical terms, the findings can be added to the expanding research that connects sustainability policies and social justice and reduction of inequality. Using the theory of Social Justice, specifically, the ideas expressed by Rawls, the paper identifies ways in which sustainability policies can be used as institutional processes that facilitate equitable allocation of resources and opportunities.

In the practical sense, the results highlight the need to enhance sustainability education in universities. Universities and colleges can also contribute to making students more aware of sustainability policies and motivate them to engage in sustainable development practices. Incorporating the concept of sustainability into the educational programs and extracurricular can possibly make students gain a greater insight about the connection between sustainability and social equity.

The findings also imply that policymakers ought to increase campaigns of awareness of citizens regarding sustainability policies as well as improve mechanisms of policy implementation. Good coordination between the governmental institutions, the universities, and the civil society organizations will help to enhance the effectiveness of sustainability programs in dealing with inequality in society.

### **Limitations**

Although the present research offers important insights, it is important to note that there are a number of limitations. To begin with, the sample used in the study targeted students of one university in Indonesia, which might not be very representative when it comes to generalizing the results to other universities or countries. Further research may widen the sample size to cover students of various universities/regions to give a bigger picture in the perception of sustainability policies among youths. Second, self-reported survey data was used in the study, and it could be impacted by social desirability bias or personal interpretation by the respondent. Though the questionnaire was made in a manner that would guarantee clarity and reliability, the perception of the sustainability policies might differ based on the knowledge and experiences of individuals.

Third, the study used a quantitative method which mainly aimed at quantifying the perception of students. Future studies that may follow a qualitative design based on interviews or focus groups may be included to offer more information on how students perceive the sustainability policies and how they can be used to solve social inequality.

Nevertheless, Despite these efforts shortcomings, the study helps in the interpretation of the relationship between sustainability policies and social inequality as viewed by university students and offers some pertinent insights to the policymakers, educators, and researchers who may be interested in sustainable development and social justice.

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