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Research Article

Knowledge and Attitude of Public Administration Students Towards Sustainable Development Goals

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the knowledge and attitudes of Public Administration students regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on their understanding of key concepts and their disposition toward embracing sustainability principles—attributes essential for their future roles as public administrators. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed at a state university in the Philippines. The respondents were selected through purposive and convenience sampling, comprising 194 students across all year levels enrolled in the first semester of the academic year 2024–2025. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Aligned with the research objectives, frequency and percentage were used to assess the students' knowledge of the SDGs, while a five-point Likert scale, mean, and standard deviation were utilized to examine their attitudes toward these goals. Results revealed that most students possess strong knowledge of the SDGs, particularly in environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity. However, limited awareness of the 2030 target year indicates a need for further educational reinforcement. Attitude assessments showed positive perceptions of sustainability, emphasizing gender equality, environmental consciousness, and integrating sustainable practices in governance and education. The study concludes that while Public Administration students demonstrate commendable knowledge and favorable attitudes toward sustainability, universities should further integrate SDG-related content into their curricula and promote experiential learning through community engagement and advocacy initiatives to strengthen students' preparedness for sustainable public governance.

Keywords: *Attitude, Curriculum, Governance, Knowledge, Public Administration, SDGs, Sustainable Development, Sustainability*

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Background

The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030 (Elamin, 2025). These 17 interconnected goals address global challenges including environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity, demanding integrated approaches and collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including government, civil society, and academia (Elamin, 2025). Public administration, in particular, plays a pivotal role in translating these ambitious global objectives into actionable policies and programs at national and local levels (Leuenberger, 2006). Effective implementation of the SDGs necessitates a new generation of public administrators equipped with comprehensive knowledge of sustainability principles and a positive disposition towards their integration into governance practices.

Higher education institutions are increasingly recognized for their critical role in fostering awareness and understanding of the SDGs among students, who will become future leaders and decision-makers (Husban, 2025; Maruna, 2019; Zamora-Polo et al., 2019). Research has explored university students' awareness, knowledge, and attitudes towards the SDGs across various disciplines and geographical contexts, highlighting the importance of educational interventions in shaping these perceptions (Afroz & Ilham, 2020; Novieastari et al., 2022; Smaniotto et al., 2020; Zamora-Polo et al., 2019). For instance, studies have assessed general university students' knowledge and attitudes, revealing varying levels of understanding and engagement with the SDG framework (Maoela et al., 2024). Others have examined the integration of sustainability education within specific fields, such as public affairs programs, emphasizing the need for comprehensive curricula to prepare students for sustainable public governance (Rangarajan & Joshi, 2018).

Given the crucial interface between public administration and sustainable development, understanding the preparedness of future public servants is paramount. This study investigates the knowledge and attitudes of Public

Administration students regarding the Sustainable Development Goals at a state university in the Philippines. By focusing on their understanding of key concepts and their disposition toward embracing sustainability principles, this research aims to assess attributes essential for their future roles as public administrators and to identify areas for educational reinforcement in integrating SDG-related content into their curricula.

The SDGs: A Global Framework for Sustainable Development

The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, represent a universal framework to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity by 2030. Comprising 17 interconnected goals and 169 targets, they provide a comprehensive blueprint addressing global challenges, including but not limited to health, education, gender equality, clean water, climate action, and sustainable economic growth (United Nations, 2015). These goals emphasize a balanced approach, integrating development's social, economic, and environmental dimensions to foster an inclusive and sustainable future.

Furthermore, the success of the SDGs depends on effective monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms to track progress and address challenges. Transparent data collection and reporting systems are critical for identifying gaps, ensuring equitable resource allocation, and guiding evidence-based policy-making. By fostering a culture of accountability, governments and organizations can build public trust and encourage greater participation from all sectors of society. Additionally, leveraging technology and innovation, such as big data analytics and digital platforms, can enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms, enabling more inclusive and dynamic approaches to achieving the SDGs.

The SDGs underscore the necessity of partnerships among governments, civil society, private organizations, and individuals. According to Sachs (2015), achieving these ambitious goals requires a multi-stakeholder approach and significant collaboration across sectors and nations. This highlights the need for local and

global initiatives that align with the SDGs' overarching principles of "leaving no one behind."

The Role of Educational Institutions in Promoting SDGs

Educational institutions are pivotal in promoting awareness and understanding of the SDGs. As centers of knowledge dissemination and capacity building, they are uniquely positioned to prepare future leaders to navigate the complexities of sustainable development. Shukla (2023) emphasizes that education is about raising awareness and fostering actionable change through effective communication, collaboration, and practical engagement with sustainability principles.

Research has shown that incorporating sustainability education into curricula significantly influences students' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable practices (Tilbury, 2011). Educational programs that integrate the SDGs into their framework cultivate knowledge and encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and a sense of global citizenship among students (UNESCO, 2017).

Public Administration programs, in particular, are instrumental in equipping students with the competencies needed to address governance challenges through the lens of sustainability. These programs emphasize principles such as social equity, transparency, accountability, and environmental stewardship—core tenets of the SDGs (Shafritz et al., 2016). However, integrating the SDGs into Public Administration education remains uneven, necessitating further research and curriculum enhancement.

Educational institutions, particularly those offering Public Administration programs, hold a central role in advancing the SDGs by equipping future leaders with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for sustainable governance. These institutions foster awareness and inspire actionable change by integrating sustainability principles into curricula. As the demand for sustainable practices in governance and policy-making continues to grow, it is crucial for educational programs to enhance their focus on the SDGs, ensuring that students are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to a more sustainable and equitable future.

Public Administration Students as Catalysts for Sustainable Governance

Public Administration students are uniquely positioned to influence governance and policy-making in ways that advance sustainable development. Their education equips them with the tools to analyze and address complex governance issues while fostering a deep understanding of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Research by Leal Filho et al. (2020) underscores the importance of involving future leaders in sustainability initiatives to ensure long-term progress.

This study focuses on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of Public Administration students at Palawan State University (PSU). As a leading institution in cultivating public service professionals, PSU provides a critical platform for exploring how students perceive and engage with the SDGs. The study investigates students' familiarity with key concepts such as environmental protection, economic growth, and social justice. It also examines their attitudes toward sustainability and how these principles influence their governance outlook and everyday practices.

As future leaders, Public Administration students are critical in shaping sustainable governance and policy frameworks. Their education prepares them to address complex governance challenges, fostering a deep commitment to social, economic, and environmental sustainability. As evidenced by research, including that of Leal Filho et al. (2020), involving these students in sustainability initiatives ensures long-term progress towards the SDGs. This study at Palawan State University aims to explore how students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sustainability can inform the development of curricula and initiatives that better equip them to lead positive, sustainable change in public governance.

Bridging the Knowledge-Practice Gap

While awareness of the SDGs grows, translating this knowledge into actionable practices remains challenging. According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, individuals' intentions to adopt sustainable behaviors are influenced by their attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Understanding these factors among Public Administration students can guide the development of targeted interventions to bridge the knowledge-practice gap.

Furthermore, studies highlight the significance of experiential learning and community engagement in fostering sustainability-oriented behaviors among students (Sterling, 2010). Integrating practical components, such as internships, community projects, and case studies, into Public Administration programs can enhance students' ability to apply sustainability principles in real-world contexts.

Research consistently underscores the importance of evaluating knowledge and attitudes within specialized academic and professional contexts to gauge preparedness and identify educational gaps. For instance, a study by Dela Cruz et al. (2023) on pharmacy interns highlighted that a positive attitude towards mental health correlates with greater knowledge, suggesting the crucial role of education in fostering desirable dispositions. Similarly, while primarily focused on instructional practices, Aquino et al.'s (2023) work with English teachers also examined their knowledge and attitudes towards integrative performance tasks, revealing insights into professional development needs. Further emphasizing this trend, Adling and Malinao's (2022) research on Filipino Food Technology students demonstrated a high level of knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding food hygiene and sanitation, indicative of practical specialized training. These studies collectively establish a precedent for investigating the understanding and disposition of students and professionals in areas critical to their fields. Building upon this established line of inquiry, the present study contributes to the literature by explicitly examining the knowledge and attitudes of Public Administration students towards the Sustainable Development Goals, a domain vital for effective future governance.

Educational institutions, particularly those focused on Public Administration, are at the forefront of driving the successful realization of SDGs. These institutions play a vital role in shaping a sustainable and equitable future by equipping future public servants with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to integrate

sustainability into governance. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on SDG education by examining how Public Administration students at Palawan State University engage with and internalize sustainability principles. Specifically, the research aims to assess their level of knowledge and explore their attitudes toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings are expected to inform curriculum development and policy advocacy, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to lead toward achieving the SDGs.

Methods

A quantitative research design with a descriptive approach was utilized to gather and analyze data systematically. The study was conducted at a state university in the Philippines, focusing on the College of Business and Accountancy, where the Bachelor of Science in Public Administration program is offered. The respondents were selected through purposive and convenience sampling, comprising 194 students across all year levels enrolled in the first semester of the academic year 2024–2025. This sampling method ensured that the participants were directly engaged in the Public Administration program, providing relevant insights for the research.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, ensuring convenience and accessibility for the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first assessed students' knowledge of the SDGs, including familiarity with key concepts and specific goals, while the second explored their attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions toward the principles of sustainable development. A 5-point Likert scale was used for the attitude section, with responses ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, to Strongly Disagree, capturing the intensity of students' views. The Likert statements used in the questionnaire were adapted from the validated study of Afroz and Ilham (2020) to ensure content validity and alignment with the objectives of this research. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency method was employed to establish the instrument's reliability. The results showed that all SDG variables demonstrated fair to good internal

consistency, with an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .905, indicating a high level of reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values for each variable were also within the acceptable range, confirming that the instrument consistently

measured the intended constructs satisfactorily. The qualitative interpretation was adapted from the study of Nyutu et al. (2020). Below is the qualitative interpretation of 5-point Likert scale measurements.

Figure 1. Qualitative Interpretation of 5-Point Likert Scale Measurements (Nyutu et al., 2020)

Point	Range of Weighted Means	Descriptive Level
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree
4	3.41 – 4.20	Agree
3	2.61 – 3.40	Neutral
2	1.81 – 2.60	Disagree
1	1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree

Artificial intelligence (AI) was also utilized to enhance the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. AI-powered tools facilitated data cleaning, pattern recognition, and the identification of key trends, enabling a deeper and more efficient analysis of the respondents' insights. This integration of AI ensured greater precision in understanding students' perspectives on sustainable development.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Approval from the University President was obtained before the research commenced, and an informed consent form was included in the Google Forms questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, alongside AI-assisted analysis to provide a comprehensive overview of students' knowledge and

attitudes toward the SDGs. These methodologies helped to identify patterns and trends in the responses, offering a detailed understanding of the students' preparedness to incorporate sustainable development principles in their future roles as leaders and administrators.

Result and Discussion

Public Administration Students' Knowledge on Sustainable Development Goals

Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the knowledge levels of Public Administration students regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This table serves as a foundation for understanding how well-informed students are about the key concepts and objectives of the SDGs, which play a crucial role in promoting sustainable development in various sectors.

Table 1. Public Administration Students' Knowledge on Sustainable Development Goals

No.	Indicator Statement	Yes	No
1	I am familiar with the term "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."	191 (98%)	3 (2%)
2	I understand that "Sustainability" refers to the ability to maintain something at a certain rate or level.	190 (98%)	4 (2%)
3	I am aware that the Sustainable Development Goals are aimed to be achieved by 2030.	162 (84%)	32 (16%)
4	Excessive use of natural resources is impacting the well-being of future generations.	189 (97%)	5 (3%)
5	Achieving sustainable development requires everyone worldwide to have access to quality education.	189 (97%)	5 (3%)
6	Environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity are the essential pillars of a nation.	191 (98%)	3 (2%)
7	Healthy oceans and seas are vital for our survival.	193 (99%)	1 (1%)

No.	Indicator Statement	Yes	No
8	Increasing the use of renewable resources can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.	189 (97%)	5 (3%)
9	Income inequality is a worldwide issue that needs global solutions.	187 (97%)	7 (3%)
10	Building strong relationships with different countries is essential for maintaining global peace.	191 (98%)	3 (2%)

Table 1 shows that most public administration students are familiar with sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 191 (98%) students said they were familiar with the term “Sustainable Development Goals”, while only 3 (2%) were not. Most students also understood sustainability means maintaining something at a specific rate or level. 190 (98%) agreed with this statement, while 4 (2%) did not. Most students understand that environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity are essential for a nation. 191 (98%) students agreed, while only 3 (2%) did not. Almost all of the students agree that healthy oceans are vital for survival.

However, there is a lack of awareness regarding the 2030 target for achieving the SDGs. While 162 (84%) students knew this deadline, 32 (16%) did not. This suggests that more education and awareness-raising initiatives are needed to ensure that future public administrators are fully informed about the urgency and timeline of the SDGs.

The table also highlights the students' strong understanding of key sustainability concepts, such as the impact of natural resource depletion on future generations, the importance of global access to quality education, the role of renewable resources in mitigating climate change, and the need for international solutions to address income inequality and promote peace. This understanding is crucial for future public administrators who will play a vital role in implementing sustainable policies and practices.

Table 1 highlights public administration students' strong awareness of sustainability concepts, 98% familiar with the SDGs, and

understanding key principles like environmental protection and social equity, aligning with Shukla's (2023) emphasis on education's role in fostering sustainable practices. However, the 16% unaware of the 2030 SDG target underscores the need for more substantial educational efforts to convey urgency and timelines. Shukla's (2023) call for training students to drive behavioral change and promote global partnerships aligns with the data, highlighting the importance of preparing future administrators to implement sustainable policies effectively.

Azhar et al. (2022) found that over 80% of higher education students demonstrated adequate sustainability knowledge, correlating with the findings in Table 1, where 98% of public administration students were familiar with the SDGs and key sustainability principles. Both studies highlight a strong foundational understanding among students, emphasizing the critical role of education in fostering awareness and preparing them to address sustainability challenges.

Public Administration Students' Attitudes on Sustainable Development Goals

Table 2 illustrates the attitudes of Public Administration students toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This table highlights students' perspectives, beliefs, and overall disposition toward the principles and objectives of the SDGs. Understanding their attitudes is essential in assessing their level of engagement and potential contribution to promoting sustainable development initiatives within their future roles in governance and public service.

Table 2. Public Administration Students' Attitudes on Sustainable Development Goals

No.	Indicator Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (sd)	Verbal Interpretation
1	Reducing poverty and hunger worldwide is more important than increasing the economic welfare of industrialized nations.	4.02	0.831	Agree
2	I believe society should have access to the highest quality free basic health services.	4.72	0.484	Strongly Agree
3	I think raising awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals among university students is essential.	4.76	0.474	Strongly Agree
4	I feel that basic environmental courses should be included in our university curriculum.	4.44	0.649	Strongly Agree
5	I believe men and women should be treated equally in every aspect of life.	4.79	0.576	Strongly Agree
6	Rising global temperatures have contributed to increased water scarcity.	4.29	0.754	Strongly Agree
7	I am concerned about environmental issues.	4.70	0.550	Strongly Agree
8	People from diverse cultural backgrounds should be treated with equal respect.	4.76	0.523	Strongly Agree
9	I make an effort to conserve electricity at home.	4.31	0.730	Strongly Agree
10	I try to minimize household waste by collecting materials for recycling.	4.18	0.780	Agree
11	Strong and resilient infrastructure is the foundation of any successful community.	4.35	0.717	Strongly Agree
12	The government should prioritize sustainability more in its policy decisions.	4.36	0.782	Strongly Agree
13	Research and educational institutions should place a greater emphasis on sustainability in their activities and campaigns.	4.55	0.601	Strongly Agree
14	I believe that adopting a sustainable lifestyle will foster peace and justice around the world.	4.59	0.622	Strongly Agree

Table 2 shows that public administration students strongly agree with the importance of sustainability and social equity. For example, they believe society should have access to high-quality free basic health services ($\bar{x}$ = 4.72). They also strongly agree that men and women should be treated equally ($\bar{x}$ = 4.79). Students are concerned about environmental issues ($\bar{x}$ = 4.70) and believe that basic environmental courses should be included in their curriculum ($\bar{x}$ = 4.44). They also recognize the impact of climate change, agreeing that rising global temperatures have contributed to water scarcity ($\bar{x}$ = 4.29).

Furthermore, students demonstrate a commitment to sustainable practices, agreeing that they make an effort to conserve electricity ($\bar{x}$ =

4.31) and try to minimize household waste by recycling ($\bar{x}$ = 4.18). They believe that strong and resilient infrastructure is key for thriving communities ($\bar{x}$ = 4.35) and that governments should prioritize sustainability in policy decisions ($\bar{x}$ = 4.36). They also advocate for a greater emphasis on sustainability in research and educational institutions ($\bar{x}$ = 4.55).

These findings highlight the students' understanding of and support for sustainable development principles and willingness to adopt sustainable practices. This suggests they will likely be receptive to and supportive of policies and initiatives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This is further supported by the previous finding that most students understand that environmental protection, economic

growth, and social equity are essential for a nation.

Table 2 shows that public administration students strongly support sustainability and social equity, advocating for equal treatment, access to basic health services, and environmental education, while demonstrating commitment to sustainable practices such as conserving electricity and recycling. This aligns with Azhar et al. (2022), where 64% of higher education students agreed with sustainability principles, indicating a positive attitude toward sustainable development. These findings suggest a strong readiness among students to support and implement policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conclusion

The study found that Public Administration students possess sound knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and hold positive attitudes toward their implementation. They demonstrate awareness of key sustainability concepts such as environmental protection, social equity, and economic growth. However, some gaps remain in their understanding of specific SDG targets, particularly the 2030 timeline, highlighting the need for enhanced curriculum integration and awareness initiatives. Overall, their favorable attitudes toward sustainability and commitment to related practices indicate strong potential to promote sustainable governance in their future roles as public administrators.

Recommendations

To prepare these students as effective public administrators, universities should strategically enhance their curriculum by embedding sustainability-focused courses beyond theoretical understanding, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for tackling real-world sustainability challenges. Raising awareness of the urgency and timeline of achieving the SDGs will help students appreciate the immediacy and importance of these global goals.

Providing opportunities for hands-on community projects, internships, and advocacy initiatives will offer students valuable practical

experience, enabling them to translate sustainability concepts into actionable policies. These experiential learning opportunities also strengthen their ability to engage with stakeholders, develop collaborative strategies, and respond to community needs effectively.

Furthermore, universities can lead by example by integrating sustainable practices into their operations such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and green campus initiatives demonstrating a commitment to their teaching principles. Such efforts create a living laboratory for students to observe and participate in sustainable governance firsthand. These measures will empower students to become proactive leaders, ready to implement sustainable policies, advocate for environmental and social equity, and drive meaningful progress in their future governance roles.

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