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Describing the Environmental Sustainability Practices of Private Higher Educational Institutions in Pagadian City

Jean Michelle Jaculbe[1]*, Marchel Jane Vibas[2], Trisha Ann Dumandan[3], Ace Virgel Batingal[4], and Mylene Alfanta[5]

[1] *CBE Department, Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines*

**Corresponding author*

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Abstract

This study describes the environmental sustainability practices implemented by private higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Pagadian City. This study utilized a qualitative case study model by Meriam and Tisdell . 6 participants were chosen purposively. The findings revealed that the environmental sustainability initiatives implemented by the PHEIs in Pagadian city are waste management, tree planting, clean-up drive, water conservation, and energy conservation. The reasons for the implementation of environmental sustainability initiatives in PHEIs are environmental stewardship initiatives, compliance with government mandates, and adherence to CHED memoranda. The benefits of implementing environmental sustainability practices in private higher education institutions in Pagadian city are environmental cleanliness, integration of cleanliness into education, and enhancement of economic welfare. The challenges encountered by private HEIs in implementing environmental sustainability practices are a lack of active involvement and financial constraints. PHEIs address the challenges by involving students in environmental activities and securing available resources. The plans of PHEIs about environmental sustainability are establishing environmental advocacy and collaboration, implementing sustainable resource and waste management, and integrating sustainable practices into the curriculum. The results indicate that the institutions are progressing well, but need additional support, collaboration, and sustainability to strengthen their environmental programs, ensuring a lasting impact and offering a practical insight for management accounting students. To improve environmental sustainability, PHEIs need to incorporate sustainability into policies and curricula, administrators must dedicate resources to sustainability initiatives, faculty should integrate sustainability ideas, students should drive campaigns, and external stakeholders should offer support.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability; Higher Education; Pagadian City; Triple Bottom Line; Resource Management

1. Introduction

This study aims to describe the environmental sustainability practices among private higher educational institutions in Pagadian City. Higher education institutions play a critical role in advancing environmental

sustainability through responsible campus operations, environmental education, and community engagement. As centers of knowledge and social development, they are expected to integrate sustainable practices into their institutional systems and activities. By transforming campuses into living laboratories for sustainability, these institutions not only reduce their own ecological footprints but also mold the mindsets of future leaders, professionals, and citizens. Consequently, evaluating how local private colleges navigate this responsibility offers crucial insights into how academic ideals can be translated into impactful, real-world environmental stewardship within the local community.

2. Related Literature

Higher education institutions (HEIs) serve as pivotal centers for knowledge creation and societal leadership, playing a critical role in addressing global environmental challenges through sustainability-driven practices (Filho et al., 2019). Under the United Nations 2030 Agenda—particularly SDG 4.7 (education for sustainable development) and SDG 13 (climate action)—HEIs are called upon to cultivate ecological literacy and sustainable behaviors among students and staff (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). These global mandates explicitly apply to private institutions in the same way as public colleges and universities, reinforcing a shared responsibility across the sector (United Nations, 2015; CHED, 2018).

Within the Philippine context, Article XIV, Section 3 of the 1987 Constitution stipulates that the State must support an education system responsive to both societal and environmental needs. This mandate is further detailed in the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, Republic Act No. 10533, which institutionalizes ecological awareness and education across all levels of learning. At the tertiary level, CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 1, series of 2015 requires all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering the BS Environmental Science program—both public and private—to integrate sustainability competencies into their curricular offerings. This directive is reinforced by CHED CMO No. 4, series of 2018, which mandates every 2HEI, including private colleges and universities, to incorporate environmental education and campus greening into their institutional development plans. These legal and policy frameworks provide a clear foundation for private HEIs to operationalize environmental sustainability within the Philippine higher education system.

Extensive literature showcases effective environmental practices in HEI worldwide. Institutions in Europe, North America, and Australasia have adopted renewable energy systems, such as solar installations and geothermal heating, implemented water conservation infrastructure, instituted waste reduction strategies, and established biodiversity stewardship programs (Leal-Filho et al., 2019; Lozano et al., 2015).

In contrast, private HEIs in Asia and Latin America are still evolving their environmental practices. Indonesian private universities are beginning to pilot sustainability education and environmental audits, though adoption remains uneven(Lawita & Samsiah, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2021). Meanwhile, studies from Latin American private institutions—such as those in Colombia—have highlighted efforts toward achieving carbon neutrality, campus sustainability systems, and community outreach programs (Osorio et al., 2022; Osuna-Ramírez et al., 2024). These initiatives often emerge from leadership-driven visions and incremental investment rather than comprehensive regulatory mandates (Lashari et al., 2022; Abello-Romero et al., 2024).

However, a dearth of standardized reporting or cross-campus evaluation remains in these private institutions, making it difficult to benchmark effectiveness across regions or identify best practices (Manes Rossi et al., 2018; 3Terama et al., 2015). While corporate sustainability accounting tools are increasingly

applicable in educational contexts (Qiu et al., 2016; Wahyuni et al., 2015), their integration into private HEIs in developing countries remains minimal.

Within the Philippines, the majority of existing research has focused on public HEIs located in major urban centers such as Metro Manila, Cebu, and Davao (Reyes et al., 2019; David et al., 2021; Bautista & Mercado, 2023). These studies report on campus greening, energy audits, recycling programs, and climate clubs—but often within well-resourced, publicly funded institutions. Research into private HEIs—especially in regional areas—remains limited. Notable exceptions include small-scale sustainability audits and green initiatives at private colleges in Mindanao (Cañete & Del Rosario, 2022; Javier & Garcia, 2020), as well as administrative efforts toward implementing paperless workflows (Tan & Santos, 2021) and student-led environmental clubs (Lopez & dela Cruz, 2020).

Nevertheless, these studies are largely localized, descriptive, and confined to isolated examples. There is a lack of multi-case, systematic analysis of how private HEIs plan and institutionalize sustainability practices, especially in smaller cities such as Pagadian City. Few studies examine barriers like leadership commitment, funding constraints, administrative expertise, or community engagement within the private HEI sector. The research strongly suggests that private HEIs remain under investigated in terms of sustainable environmental practices, despite their potential influence as community anchors and change agents.

Given the robust international and national mandates coupled with evidence of successful environmental programs in other countries, it is clear that private HEIs 4in the Philippines are both required and capable of implementing sustainable practices. However, the minimal empirical literature on the private sector—particularly in smaller urban centers—presents a significant research gap. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the environmental sustainability practices of private HEIs in Pagadian City—documenting what practices exist, how they are implemented, barriers encountered, and how these practices align with CHED directives and SDG obligations.

By focusing on private HEIs outside major metropolitan areas, this research will provide unique contextual insights into institution-level strategies, resource needs, and leadership dynamics necessary for sustainable environmental practice. The findings can inform policy development, strategic planning, and cross-institutional collaboration across similar Philippine cities, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in sustainable higher education.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to conduct an in-depth, context-specific examination of environmental sustainability practices across a bounded system of six purposively selected private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Pagadian City. Data were gathered through a multi-method approach using three distinct instruments—semi-structured interview guides with key administrative personnel from Community Engagement Services (CES) units, document analysis checklists for institutional policies and reports, and an observation protocol for non-intrusive campus infrastructure inspections—ensuring robust data triangulation. Strict ethical protocols were maintained, including securing institutional clearances, obtaining signed informed consent, and ensuring participant anonymity. Data analysis followed an iterative qualitative process of open coding and categorical aggregation to construct a thematic framework anchored in existing literature, while data trustworthiness was verified

through member checking to deliver an authentic, nuanced narrative of how regional private HEIs institutionalize sustainability amid localized constraints.

4. Findings and Conclusion

The environmental sustainability initiatives implemented by the PHEIs in Pagadian city are waste management, tree planting, clean-up drive, water conservation, and energy conservation. The reasons for the implementation of environmental sustainability initiatives in PHEIs are environmental stewardship initiatives, compliance with government mandates, and adherence to CHED memoranda. The benefits of implementing environmental sustainability practices in private higher education institutions in Pagadian city are environmental cleanliness, integration of cleanliness into education, and enhancement of economic welfare. The challenges encountered by private HEIs in implementing the environmental sustainability practices are lack of active involvement and financial constraints. PHEIs address the challenges by involving students in environmental activities and securing available resources. The future plans of PHEIs about environmental sustainability are establishing environmental advocacy and collaboration, implementing sustainable resource and waste management, and integrating sustainable practices into the curriculum.

The study revealed that private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in Pagadian City have indeed adopted various environmental sustainability practices, such as educating students, involving them in activities, securing resources, and demonstrating the benefits of environmental initiatives. However, despite these efforts, the institutions face several challenges, including financial limitations, lack of resources, and weak post-planting management. These challenges hinder the continuity and long-term success of their initiatives. Results suggest that while the PHEIs are committed to promoting sustainability, they need stronger support systems—particularly in terms of funding, resource allocation, and consistent post-project management. There is also a need for continuous student engagement to sustain behavioral change. In conclusion, the institutions are on the right track, but they require additional assistance, collaboration, and sustainable planning mechanisms to further strengthen their environmental programs and ensure a lasting impact.

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