

# Implementing key competencies into global education system



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*From Theory to Practice: Will Key Competencies ever be successfully implemented into the global education system?*

At this current time, there is no global consensus for deciding which essential Environmental Sustainability (ES) Key Competencies should be utilised for the benefit of higher education. This is largely due to societal, cultural and economic differences between nations. This is exemplified by Rieckman, 2011, which selected experts on Key Sustainable development from Europe (United Kingdom and Germany) and Latin America (Chile, Ecuador, Mexico). The lack of agreement raises the question: how can key competencies be adequately implemented when most studies have failed to narrow them down to less than ten elements? Both Barth *et al.*, 2007 and Rieckmann illustrate this issue; acknowledging that currently, only 100 institutions have implemented key competencies of Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HESD). The vagueness and ambiguity within this area suggests more international discussion is required (despite being coined in the 1990s (Hidalgo & Fuentes, 2013)), to adequately implement the most necessary key competencies into HESD. Having said this, the author's twelve Key competencies are distilled into three core elements: "systemic thinking and handling of complexity, anticipatory thinking and critical thinking", which are mutual between the two examined geographic regions.

Rieckmann's expert selection process (whereby participants are selected because of their association with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) "scientifically or conceptually") associated with a Delphi approach, appears to be legitimate. Yet, the legitimacy of the methodology is limited beyond this point, because it is flawed by the fact that only two global

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regions are represented and the potential for lacking statistical veracity within the study. To elaborate further, Rieckmann's results are only representative of the selected geographic regions and therefore the core key competencies are not reflective of potential expert views from five other continents. The latter issue questions the transparency of results, because of the inherent ambiguity represented by SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). Recent academic debate suggests that due to the restrictedness of SPSS outputs, subsequent results could be questionable (Basto & Pereira, 2012). Software such as R allows for complete transparency because the author can include all statistical analysis in the appendix, which can be fully checked in peer review.

The author makes a valid point in emphasising the necessity for teaching critical and independent thinking in preparation for "complex situations". However, Rieckmann under-appreciates the essentiality for informing people with relevant knowledge. Arguably, sufficient knowledge is just as much as necessity, because a well informed, yet critically thinking environmental sustainability stakeholder is likely to resolve an issue faster than a person who is ignorant of an impending problem, in spite of their acquired competencies. If Rieckman represents the general consensus for the thinking of how competencies should be implemented into HESD, then perhaps relevant knowledge should be included as an additional Key competency for such initiatives.

Rieckmann focuses solely on implementation of key competencies for ES on higher education institutions. However, such initiatives are logistically harder to achieve in less developed nations (due to the lack of universities, poor

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economy and reduced demographics attending university) and therefore by principle, the author's approach is exclusive and inherently unsustainable, because only small (despite being influential) demographics can obtain this essential skill set. The co-operative 'bottom-up' approach favoured by Latin American countries integrates key competencies for sustainable development at school level, for the sake of inclusivity and will theoretically, significantly increase the potential demographic that benefits from such initiatives (UNESCO. 2017; United Nations. 2012). More organised and case-specific national and international discussion is required over the implementation of key competencies at all levels of education (Hidalgo & Fuentes. 2013). This is largely because as argued by Schuttler *et al.* , 2018, the only way to secure a socially and environmentally sustainable future, where people appreciate the natural world, is to sow the seed of inspiration during childhood. Children are integral to influencing the future, whatever their future aspirations may be (Schuttler *et al.* , 2018).

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