

"The Convergence of Community Based Learning, Education for Sustainable Development and Islam in Higher Education and a Case Study from Egypt"

Community-Based Learning (CBL), a form of experiential learning, promotes a deeper understanding of one's discipline, by utilizing a wide variety of instructional methods and activities to engage and interact with communities, to form a connection between what is taught in classrooms to the real world, including local institutions, natural environment, history and cultural heritage. CBL aims to build the capacity of students to conduct applied research and hone their practical skills supplemented by knowledge of their community and an ethic of service towards it.

CBL and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) demonstrate a powerful synergy for establishing a holistic, interdisciplinary, and transformative approach to higher education with local and global perspectives. As such both CBL and ESD are effective strategies for addressing sustainability challenges. Both ESD and CBL reflect common themes found across diverse religious teachings and traditions of Islam and other religions - which is the main topic of this paper. The paper presents the intricate relationship between ESB, CBL and Islam and explores the significance of integrating spirituality and religious teachings into these educational frameworks with a focus on implementation in Egypt - a country with a rich spiritual heritage facing significant environmental issues.

The objective of this research is to help understand the ability of spirituality and religion to foster, support and guide sustainability initiatives and education in higher education institutions; thereby enhancing their effectiveness and reach. Specifically, the contribution of Islamic teachings to the goals of ESD and CBL is discussed, given the prominence of Islam in Egyptian communities. Quranic verses and Hadiths that advocate for environmental stewardship, sustainable resource management and community development are examined to support and highlight the connection between Islam and sustainability and the role it plays in societal and cultural setting. Additionally, the historical significance and relevance to modern day sustainability challenges is highlighted. Additionally, we present a case study of Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development (HU) in Egypt, given its commitment to ESD and CBL - where so far more than 2000 students and teachers have taken part in.

The paper also discusses the challenges that may arise as a result of integrating spiritual perspectives into ESD/CBL, such as cultural sensitivities, differing interpretations of religious texts, and institutional and political barriers. We conclude with recommendations and proposals of specific measures that can be taken to address these challenges and drive the integration of spirituality into ESD and CBL, such as, the promotion of interfaith dialogue within the classroom, developing inclusive curricula and enhancing community engagement strategies.

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