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# Promoting climate action through youth empowerment and environmental education: Insights from Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities

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**Abstract:** Climate change is a pressing global challenge that requires immediate action. To address this issue effectively, it is essential to engage and empower the younger generation who will shape the future. This abstract presents the experience of Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZUH) in UAE in promoting climate action through youth empowerment and environmental education. MBZUH has recognized the significance of incorporating environmental education into its curriculum to foster a generation of environmentally conscious individuals. Through a multidimensional approach, the university has developed innovative strategies to empower students, enabling them to become active participants in addressing climate change. These strategies encompass both formal and informal education, leveraging various platforms and partnerships to create a comprehensive learning environment. This study delves into the initiatives undertaken by MBZUH to empower youth in climate action. It explores the incorporation of environmental education across disciplines, integrating sustainability principles into existing courses, and offering specialized programs focused on environmental science and climate studies. Additionally, it highlights the university's efforts in promoting hands-on learning experiences, such as field trips, research projects, and community engagement, to deepen students' understanding of climate issues and inspire practical action. Furthermore, the study examines the role of MBZUH's collaboration with local and international organizations, governmental bodies, and the wider community in fostering youth empowerment and climate action. It showcases successful partnerships that have resulted in impactful initiatives, including awareness campaigns, capacity-building workshops, and youth-led environmental projects. By sharing the experience of MBZUH, this study aims to provide valuable insights and best practices for promoting climate action through youth empowerment and environmental education. It underscores the importance of empowering the next generation with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to become effective agents of change in addressing climate challenges.

**Keywords:** Climate action; Youth empowerment; Environmental Education (EE); Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZUH); Sustainability; Interdisciplinary learning; community engagement

## 1. Introduction

Climate change presents a concern for our society at present due to activities, like burning fossil fuels and cutting down forests, which have released large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Causing notable disturbances, to the Earth's climate patterns already affecting ecosystems and economies and overall well-being of life.

Climate change is clearly showing its impact through frequent and intense heatwaves, droughts and wildfires. Unpredictable changes in rainfall patterns lead to floods and severe storms while rising sea levels pose a threat to areas and island

nations. In addition to these effects climate change exacerbates issues, like food and water scarcity, population displacement and the decline of biodiversity (Wells, 2019).

Dealing with these issues demands efforts that engage a wide range of stakeholders. Governments and individuals alike must now consider switching to eco options as a necessity rather, than just an option. Yet this duty cannot be shouldered by policymakers or experts. Climate initiatives should encompass all facets of society with the youth holding a position, in driving change (Klein, 2014).

The youth have a role in combating climate change because they make up a large part of the world's population and have the innovative spirit to drive change forward effectively and have a lot at stake in today's decisions since they will bear the consequences of climate actions, in the long run Their progressive mindset positions them as influential supporters of creating a sustainable and just tomorrow (Global Sustainable Development Report, 2019).

People's movements like Fridays for Future and the Sunrise Movement have proven the capabilities of youth to the global community already. These campaigns have engaged millions of individuals. Increased awareness regarding environmental concerns while ensuring leaders are responsible for their choices. By participating in movements young individuals have shown that they are not merely bystanders in the climate dilemma but rather catalysts, for transformation.

Environmental education is crucial, for unlocking the potential of young people by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge to comprehend climate issues and develop solutions effectively.

This study delves into the impact of empowering individuals and promoting environmental awareness on advancing climate initiatives at Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities by sharing real life instances of achievements and obstacles faced along with potential prospects ahead. The intention behind presenting these case studies is to demonstrate the role of involving youth in fostering a greener tomorrow and encouraging broader participation in the global campaign, against climate crisis.

## **2. The importance of the youth in climate action**

The engagement of people in addressing climate issues is crucial for several reasons that stand out prominently in this context; Firstly, and most importantly; the demographic significance of the youth population globally cannot be overstated. As per the United Nations data on demographics reveal that there are over 1.8 billion young individuals aged between 15 to 24 years old representing about one fourth of the world's total population statistics (World Youth Report, 2017). This substantial demographic presence empowers the youth to influence both future directions, in climate action initiatives.

In addition to that point mentioned earlier on climate change activism by people has been quite impactful in driving change forward rapidly and effectively. Notably initiatives like Fridays for Future led by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and the Sunrise Movement in the United States have drawn interest and brought together millions of youths worldwide. By organizing protests strikes and advocacy efforts these youth led movements have played a role in increasing awareness about climate change issues, at both local and global levels. They have successfully leveraged social media channels and community-based efforts to amplify their messages and advocate for action, on climate change (Hadden, 2020).

Youth driven climate movements go beyond creating awareness. They have significantly shaped policy debates and decisions by pushing for swift and bold action on climate change issues. They have pushed governments and decision makers to focus on climate concerns by demanding urgent and ambitious steps, towards sustainable and eco-friendly economies (Van der 2021).

The energy and originality of people offer a new outlook on climate action and the challenges it brings about due to climate change issues. Their optimism and creative thinking pave the way for fresh strategies and solutions to tackle these intricate problems. By leveraging the vigor and zeal of the youth we are able to unleash their capacity as drivers of change and promoters of sustainable progress involving young individuals, in climate initiatives not only gives them a sense of empowerment but also enriches society by utilizing their distinct talents, thoughts and viewpoints (Rode, 2020).

### **3. Environmental education: What is it and why is it important?**

Teaching about the environment is essential for encouraging action, on climate change and empowering people to get involved in tackling environmental issues. Here we'll delve into what environmental education means and aims to achieve and how it helps shape sustainable behaviors and mindsets in the younger generation.

Environmental education is described as an encompassing and multidisciplinary method of learning that emphasizes raising awareness and understanding of the environments' connections to social and economic systems as well, as ecological systems (UNESCO, 2017).

Environmental education has goals that involve multiple important aspects to consider. Initially the main objective is to increase consciousness and deepen comprehension of environmental concerns like climate change, decline in biodiversity and pollution. It emphasizes the link between human behaviors and the environment. Moreover, this kind of education aims to enhance awareness and understanding by offering details on environmental processes, ecosystems and the outcomes of human activities. Empowering individuals, with knowledge enables them to make well informed choices and undertake responsible actions.

Moreover, environmental education aims to cultivate beliefs and mindsets that encourage caring for the environment with a reverence for nature and a commitment to sustainable progress. It aims to nurture a strong admiration for the beauty of the outdoors and a sincere urge to safeguard and preserve it. Ultimately one of its key goals is to equip individuals, with the abilities and expertise needed to tackle environmental issues efficiently. These abilities include analysis skills for problem solving and effective communication for collaborating in efforts, towards impactful climate initiatives and sustainable environmental strategies (Kollmust, 2002).

Education has an impact on shaping sustainable behaviors and mindsets, in young people specifically when it comes to integrating environmental education into various learning settings—both formal and informal—leading to several important results.

Environmental education plays a role in raising awareness, about environmental issues and promoting sustainable behaviors among individuals.

Furthermore, teaching about the environment emphasizes the importance of considering how different aspects such, as society, economy and nature are all

connected. This broad view helps people understand and tackle the underlying issues causing challenges instead of just dealing with their surface effects.

Additionally teaching about the environment promotes thinking and solving problems. It provides people, young people with important abilities to analyze complicated environmental problems consider different viewpoints and suggest creative answers. This ability to assess information critically help them handle issues effectively and decide wisely.

Lastly teaching about the environment promotes being a citizen of the Earth. It gives people the power to get involved in environmental problems both locally and globally making them supporters of making things better. They are more likely to take part in community projects and help with making development that can be continued without harming the environment showcasing well informed care, for nature (Tilbury, 2011).

Engaging people with environmental knowledge and critical thinking skills plays a crucial role in driving effective climate action forward. Teachings about the environment serve as a driver, in reaching this objective by giving youths a diverse toolkit to tackle the urgent issues related to climate change. First and foremost, it provides them with an understanding of climate change. Its root causes and far-reaching consequences. This raises awareness. Cultivates a sense of duty to address these pressing matters. Furthermore, environmental education fosters problem solving abilities by nurturing thinking and fostering innovative approaches to address and adapt to climate change – crucial skills for addressing the intricate and ever-changing environmental issues at hand. Additionally, it promotes involvement by equipping individuals with the information and resources needed to actively participate in climate related activities; this includes supporting sustainable development projects; engaging in advocacy campaigns; and playing a significant role, in decision making procedures. In the end teaching about the environment could lead to lasting changes in behavior by instilling values and knowledge about sustainability in people. This could help them adopt ecofriendly habits in their daily lives and become committed stewards of the environment for life. Ultimately this could play a role, in creating a more sustainable and resilient future (Hungerford, 1989) (Chawla, 2012).

#### **4. Case study: Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities**

Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZUH) a known academic institution focusing on humanities and social sciences based in Abu Dhabi and Ajman caters to approximately 1000 students and holds a prominent position in promoting sustainability despite its primary emphasis on non-scientific disciplines. In demonstration of its dedication, to instilling consciousness and equipping students to tackle significant global issues MBZUH actively engages in various local and international programs including waste management workshops and participation in COP28.

##### **4.1. Innovative campus initiatives: Pioneering environmental awareness**

While MBZUH mainly emphasizes the humanities field of study it has made an effort to incorporate sustainability across its academic and extracurricular initiatives. The creation of the Environment and Sustainability Club, in May 2023 which initially

attracted 44 student members has provided a platform for individuals to delve into sustainability dialogues launch initiatives and spearhead campus wide efforts geared towards boosting eco consciousness. On average students participate in. Coordinate around 13–16 environmentally focused events annually comprising various projects, campaigns and activities. This club now plays a role in advancing the university's commitment, to sustainability.

In addition to that MBZUH utilizes cutting edge technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to tackle concerns via workshops and joint projects. Educational programs provided by the university help students develop the abilities to propose answers to worldwide environmental problems. 15 % of the courses at MBZUH cover sustainability subjects such as Natural Sciences course, Sustainable Development, in Islamic Law and its Applications and Shaikh Zayeds Sustainable Legacy course. This demonstrates the institutions dedication to including environmental education in its curriculum. The university's commitment to sustainability is evident, in its initiatives that equip students with the skills to address environmental challenges using a variety of disciplines.

The Ministry of Education Sustainability Workshops and other extensive educational projects have been key in supporting MBZUH initiatives as well as involving 1651 individuals from universities and schools in promoting environmental education and leadership skills development programs like the Leadership and Diplomacy Program (attended by 1437 participants) along with the Green Communities Program (with 218 participants) which offer practical experiences fostering a sense of responsibility, towards the environment.

#### **4.2. Community engagement beyond campus: Expanding environmental footprints**

MBZUHs commitment to causes goes beyond its campus boundaries by partnering with local and global groups. The university played a role in organizing five sessions at COP28 with the theme "Youth Leading Sustainability." These sessions discussed subjects such as Campus Environmental Projects, Country's Sustainable Education Programs and Women's Empowerment, through Environmental Awareness.

During COP28 events MBZH joined forces with organizations like the Ministry of Education and the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment as well as esteemed universities such as Zayed University, Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) and the University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD). The gatherings attracted 150 attendees with students receiving laptops in appreciation of their active involvement. Furthermore, students from MBZUH volunteered in COP28's designated zone to assist with event coordination and showcase the university's global commitment, to environmental issues.

After COP28 has concluded its activities MBZUH has engaged in sustainability initiatives. One notable example is the collaboration with Sorbonne University—Abu Dhabi and Total Energy where students from MBZUH took part in La Nuit des Idées. The event centered on reducing plastic usage. Brainstormed innovative ideas, like implementing a smart wall for segregating waste materials.

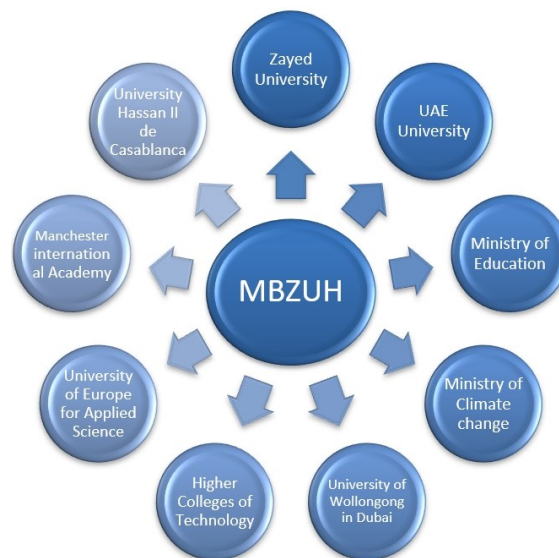
Furthermore, MBZUH's outdoor initiative known as the Green June Campaign had than 100 students engaging in planting mangroves to curb greenhouse gas emissions. This initiative showcased MBZUH's dedication to environmental work by giving students hands on experience, in tackling climate change.

### 4.3. Fostering global collaborations: Empowering youth for climate action

During COP28 conference participation at MBZUH saw them expanding their reach globally by emphasizing the role of people in addressing climate issues. In a representation provided in **Figure 1** it is depicted that faculty and students from the university collaborated with various prominent organizations such as the Ministry of Education and UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment along with international entities like the University of Europe for Applied Sciences in Germany, Manchester International Academy and Université Hassan II de Casablanca, in Morocco.

The collaborations allowed students at MBZUH join conversations about sustainability and connect with government officials and environmental experts to expand their networks and knowledge base on global climate strategies towards making meaningful contributions, to environmental initiatives in the future.

Sustainability efforts at MBZUH are fueled by a shared sense of responsibility and teamwork across departments within the institution. Collaborations with partners demonstrate the effectiveness of combining skills and resources to address climate challenges effectively. A significant portion of the faculty and staff at the university. 20% of faculty members and 10% of staff actively participate in these initiatives alongside students. This collective effort does not highlight MBZUH commitment, to environmental stewardship only but also fosters a collaborative atmosphere where students are encouraged to take charge and get involved in impactful sustainability projects. The university dedicates a budget ranging from \$20K to \$40K to sustain and advance its environmental initiatives and collaborations.



**Figure 1.** MBZUH collaborations during COP28: A network of institutional partnerships

#### **4.4. Global goals, local action: MBZUH's role in achieving the SDGs**

Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZUH) despite its academic focus not being environmental science per se is actively supporting multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The university efforts in education (as shown in **Figure 2**) sustainability practices and empowering young people have made substantial impacts, on the global sustainability mission by incorporating sustainability principles into diverse programs.

Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities effectively contributes to achieving Development Goal 4 by focusing on providing quality education that promotes inclusive learning and lifelong educational opportunities for everyone involved in the educational process. Through its partnership with the Ministry of Education in the UAE; MBZUH successfully organized sustainability workshops that benefitted a total of 1651 students and educators. These workshops were not about raising awareness on environmental concerns only but also aimed at involving MBZUH students as mentors and facilitators empowering them to take charge and lead by example, in the education sector. By taking a role in learning and teaching alike students at MBZUH expanded their knowledge of sustainability matters and school students reaped the rewards of creative instructional approaches that cultivated a stronger respect, for nature.

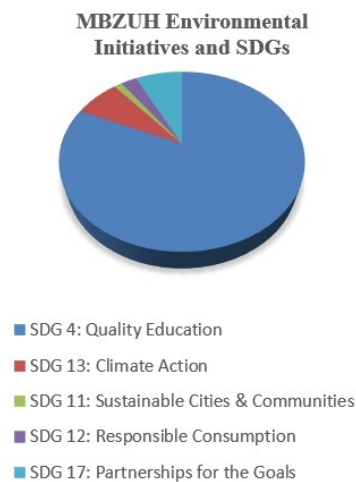
Under the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 13 Climate Action (SDG 13) MBZUH has engaged in efforts to combat climate change effectively. During the university's Green June Initiative event more than 100 students actively took part in planting mangroves. This activity plays a role in capturing carbon dioxide and highlights the university's dedication to taking tangible steps, towards addressing climate change issues effectively. The Environment and Sustainability Club boasts 44 members serves as an engaging hub for students involved in various climate related endeavors such as projects and research while advocating for the importance of youth leading the way in climate action efforts.

MBZUHs commitment to Development Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities can be seen in the university's initiatives to promote sustainable city living. The university organizes trips such as the Farz Waste Management Visit to give students a hands-on understanding of managing urban waste systems. This visit teaches students about the significance of waste segregation and recycling in building cities and how efficient waste management practices can minimize environmental harm. By incorporating these hands-on learning opportunities into their curriculum MBZUH empowers students to brainstorm solutions, for building sustainable urban communities.

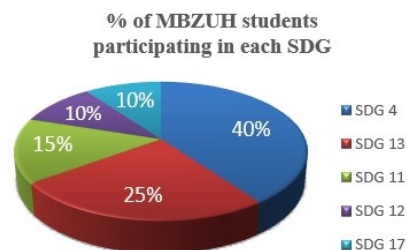
The University has shown progress in promoting sustainable habits in line with SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production both within the campus and outside it. During events like La Nuit des Idées students were tasked with coming up with ideas to cut down on plastic waste. Their efforts resulted in an award-winning proposal, for a waste separation wall. A breakthrough that underscores the university's dedication to promoting responsible consumption. The occasion motivated students to analyze waste management and encouraged them to discover creative methods to reduce the environmental impact of consumer behaviors.

MBZUHs involvement in SDG 17 illustrates the university’s understanding of the significance of working to attain sustainability objectives. They have established partnerships with local and global organizations like Total Energy, Sorbonne University, Abu Dhabi, the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment as well as other universities such as UOWD, Zayed University, and UAE University. These collaborations have enabled MBZUH to expand its sustainability initiatives, exchange expertise and create environmental initiatives. The partnership structure guarantees that the efforts by MBZUH not help the campus community only but also support the broader worldwide push, for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In **Figure 3** we can see the involvement of students at MBZUH in different environmental projects. This demonstrates how their actions are spread out among Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The display presents the range of student engagement with a significant focus on SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 13 (Climate Action) which highlights the university’s dedication to promoting environmental consciousness and initiatives, for climate change mitigation. The graph also highlights the significance of collaborations and eco-friendly approaches since students play a role in supporting Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 12 while also emphasizing Goal 17 Showcasing MBZUH commitment to promoting sustainability, on both a local and global scale.



**Figure 2.** MBZUH environmental initiatives alignment with SDGs.



**Figure 3.** The percentage of MBZUH students participating in each SDG.



## **5. Challenges and opportunities**

Promoting youth empowerment and environmental education at Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities encounters obstacles that also offer chances for progress and creativity. The availability of resources, like financial restrictions may limit the extent and range of projects. Incorporating education into the curriculum involves surpassing disciplinary boundaries and potential opposition to change from stakeholders used to conventional educational approaches. Moreover, Ensuring enduring sustainability present logistical and institutional hurdles. Nevertheless, there are possibilities to tackle these challenges efficiently. The increasing worldwide acknowledgment of the significance of learning and empowering young individuals has the potential to garner backing from government officials and schools alike. Teaming up with allies such as governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business players can broaden the influence and effectiveness of MBZUH. Progress in technology and the emergence of internet-based platforms present methods, for educating and involving young people. Furthermore, the global connectivity fosters teamwork with youth groups giving students the chance to exchange ideas gain insights from successful strategies and participate in the wider global environmental movement. By acknowledging and tackling these obstacles and making use of these chances MBZUH can further improve its initiatives in empowering people and educating about the environment ultimately nurturing a commitment, to climate activism and environmental sustainability.

## **6. Conclusion and call to action**

In summary and to wrap it up nicely; empowering people and teaching them about the environment are key ingredients in driving climate action and building a future that's sustainable for all of us to thrive in together as a global community facing this climate crisis head on with urgency and unity being essential factors for success here; involving youth is vital for making real and impactful changes happen around us all as one unit working towards a better world for everyone involved out there as demonstrated by the experience at Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities (MBZH) where they've shown us how integrating environmental education into their educational programs can make a significant difference while giving youths platforms to engage actively in solving environmental issues we face today.

The achievements at MBZUH showcase how involving people can make a significant difference in spreading awareness and coming up with creative solutions that promote lasting change and environmentally conscious behaviors by educating them on environmental matters and enhancing their problem-solving skills and critical thinking capabilities to enable them to play an active role, in building a sustainable and adaptable tomorrow.

Nevertheless, there are obstacles that remain. Issues such as resource constraints integrating curriculum, skepticism towards change and the ability to expand challenges that must be overcome. However, embedded within these obstacles are chances for advancement. Government and organizational backing working together with collaborators, advancements in technology and connections, within global youth communities present pathways to amplify the effectiveness of initiatives focused on empowering youth and promoting environmental education.

That's why we urge policymakers to take action and work together with educators and stakeholders.

Educational organizations and authorities should prioritize education by investing in integrating sustainability concepts into curricula and providing hands on learning opportunities, for students. This effort will equip people with the understanding and skills needed to address the issues brought about by the climate emergency.

Collaborating with partners like government agencies and non-profits along with industry stakeholders is essential for our efforts to be successful and have an impact, on empowering youth and advancing environmental education programs through shared expertise and combined resources.

Use technology progress to improve education and involve young people more actively in the process too by utilizing online resources and digital tools for easier access, to education and sharing knowledge to empower them to take part in global climate initiatives.

Appreciate the viewpoints and efforts of young people in addressing climate issues by ensuring that there are avenues, for youth driven groups and projects to participate in decision making processes and have their voices heard.

By adopting these measures, we can unleash the capabilities of empowering young people and promoting environmental awareness forming a potent driver for bringing about beneficial transformations, amidst the challenges posed by climate change.

**Conflict of interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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