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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' WILLINGNESS TO ADDRESS SUSTAINABILITY AWARENESS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN ROMANIA*

Introduction: Various policy actions emphasize an urgent need to develop a shared vision for equipping teachers and learners with the knowledge and skills to embed sustainability in their teaching.

Research Aim: This research aims to discuss pre-service teachers' willingness to include in their teaching of English and French environmental issues with the purpose of developing learners' sustainability awareness. Given the responsibility that educators have towards future generations of learners, a change in attitude and behaviour is needed concerning the environment we live in. As in Romania, the current status of environmental literacy is at an incipient level, this paper sets out to investigate would-be language teachers' readiness to assume the role of "agents of change".

Research Method: The study included 80 participants, and a survey was used as a research instrument. Data collected were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively through descriptive statistics using Google Forms' built-in tools, Jamovi 2.6.26, and Voyant Tools for content analysis.

Results: The main findings refer to the fact that even if pre-service teachers are willing to address sustainability in their teaching, their level of preparedness should be improved.

Conclusion: The potential for pre-service language teachers to become active agents of sustainable development is evident. Still, this potential must be guided by curriculum innovation, professional development, and increased exposure to interdisciplinary resources.

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainability, environmental awareness, pre-service teachers, foreign language teaching, green skills, environmental literacy, ecocriticism

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INTRODUCTION

Adopting a didactic perspective on ecological and sustainability themes within foreign language education represents an axiological shift that reconfigures the goals and values of language teaching. This reconceptualization aligns with broader educational imperatives, incorporating concepts such as environmental justice and citizenship (Guevarra-Hererro et al., 2024; Hadjichambis & Paraskeva-Hadjichambi, 2020; Haluza-DeLay, 2013; Walter et al., 2020), ecolinguistics (Bellewes, 2024; Chau et al., 2022; Stibbe, 2015; Zheng et al., 2024) and social justice (Hart, 2023; Micalay-Hurtado & Poole, 2022; Raton et al., 2024). Emerging pedagogical approaches, such as ecopedagogy (Bellewes, 2024; Kahn, 2008), emphasize that foreign language learning can become a powerful tool to support students in becoming critically aware and environmentally responsible global citizens.

According to Sterling (2001), this paradigm shift involves a transition to deep learning, characterized by the integration of three levels of learning: first-order learning (informational), second-order learning (critical), and third-order learning (transformational). This framework moves learners beyond passive knowledge acquisition (adaptive learning) toward being active, reflective, and engaged in real-world issues (transformative learning). By merging Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Second/Foreign Language Acquisition (SLA) theories to promote transformative learning, it leads to a “profound shift in perspective towards more sustainable ways of living and interacting with the world” (Yu et al., 2024, p. 6).

Studies focusing on the inclusion of sustainability and ecological themes in foreign language teaching emphasize the fact that the theoretical principles underlying environmental citizenship and sustainability education should not be limited to validating an environmental awareness (Janks, 2020; Kapranov, 2022; Micalay-Hurtado & Poole, 2022; Yu et al., 2024) that positions the language learner in what Sterling (2001) calls “adaptive learning”. On the contrary, the contribution of ecolinguistics and critical language awareness to the development of the environmental and sustainability education paradigm must be directed towards mobilizing a “critical consciousness” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 6), which will determine learners to act and adopt responsible behaviours towards everything that surrounds them. Our paper is grounded in the field of educational sciences and does not intend to offer an informed view on general issues of climate change and environmental degradation. Humans’ environmental footprint has been widely documented, and research in this field indicates how, for example, plastic pollution has become a threat to people and the environment as several ocean garbage patches have been formed (Pyrek, 2016; van Sebille et al., 2012). In this context, education is called upon to take a more active role in developing learners’ awareness of environmental issues and encouraging them to be more responsible and proactive. Various policy actions issued by the European Commission in the past five years emphasize an urgent need to develop a shared vision for equipping teachers and learn-

ers with the knowledge and skills to embed sustainability and green transition in their teaching and learning. The European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019) to fight climate change and environmental degradation represents one of the main pillars for teaching and learning for a sustainable environment. These recommendations and policy actions constitute the underlying theoretical framework underpinning the research questions of this paper. The European Union's Council Recommendation (European Commission, 2022a) underscores the need to support educators to teach and prioritise climate change awareness and sustainability in various programmes, in formal and non-formal contexts, from early education to adult learning. Therefore, in connection with these policy actions, the duties of the foreign language teacher are no longer limited to developing learners' communicative skills and intercultural competence as indicated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Teaching and Learning (CEFR, 2001). In an attempt to prepare the educational system for the green transition, the European Union's Council Recommendation (European Commission, 2022a) indicates new roles and responsibilities for teachers. Irrespective of their discipline, teachers should become advocates for sustainability and engage learners in transformative and interdisciplinary learning by using methods that are collaborative and experiential (European Commission, 2022a). With regard to technological advancements, teachers should use new digital tools to help learners understand the importance of sustainable lifestyles both locally and globally. Thus, the development of sustainable competences should be part of initial teacher training programmes and continuous professional development (European Commission, 2022a).

In light of these new policies, teachers' responsibilities are expanding significantly and should encompass a range of skills that complement foreign language learning. GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework (European Commission, 2022b), identifies a set of competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that promote responsibility, awareness, and care for the environment. The areas of sustainable competences refer to: "embodying sustainability values", "embracing complexity in sustainability", "envisioning sustainable futures" and "acting for sustainability" (European Commission, 2022b, pp. 13–14). In line with the educators' need to facilitate students' learning for the green transition, we adopt in this paper the following working definition: sustainability refers to creating diverse learning experiences that are conducive to understanding climate change and which prioritise the need to protect the environment and its biodiversity.

This paper widens the discussion about foreign language teachers' willingness to integrate sustainability themes into their teaching practice. It explores how language instruction can be effectively aligned with the development of green skills and environmental awareness and investigates pre-service teachers' readiness to promote eco-friendly attitudes and behaviours through foreign language teaching. The paper intends to explore how foreign language educators perceive their role

in fostering environmental citizenship and sustainable development through language instruction.

Re-designing teachers' role in education for promoting sustainability

At the international level, organizations such as UNESCO and the United Nations have emphasized the critical role that education has in promoting sustainability and responsible environmental behaviour (Stibbe, 2014). Cohen and Horm-Wingerd (1993) argue that ecological awareness, a fundamental component of environmental responsibility, should be developed from early education. In the same line of thought, GreenComp “maps sustainability as a competence relevant to all ages” (European Commission, 2022b, p. 12). However, this ecological awareness is intended not only to inform but also to shape values, attitudes, and behaviours in line with sustainable development goals. Ecolinguistics and critical language awareness play a vital role in this transformation by positioning language as a tool for shaping thought at the conceptual and informative level. As Janks (2013) asserts, language education should empower learners to have a mindset able to “question existing power relations and to examine the ways in which language works to serve the interests of some at the expense of others” (p. 229). Within this framework, language educators should guide learners from passive comprehension to active engagement.

Furthermore, in response to the urgent demands posed by environmental degradation and climate change, the role of the foreign language teacher must be re-dimensioned. As Chau et al. (2022) propose, teachers should become “socially engaged language educators” (p. 338) willing to explore how language learning can go beyond what is typically taught in the classroom. Thus, in addition to being cultural and linguistic mediators, language teachers are uniquely positioned to use language as a tool for developing learners' responsible behaviour towards the environment and for promoting sustainability. Notably, the global narrative on climate change can generate extreme anxiety among young learners and youths (Kennedy et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2020). Thus, the foreign language classroom can become a valuable arena for addressing, in a responsible and age-appropriate manner, pressing environmental problems worldwide, helping to mitigate eco-anxiety while fostering a hopeful outlook.

In the context of foreign language learning, European reference documents beginning with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) and further expanded in the CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR, 2020) have progressively outlined a more holistic vision of linguistic education. These frameworks highlight the increasingly complex role of language education in preparing learners for developing intercultural communication, democratic participation, and global citizenship. In the context of foreign language acquisition, today's learners are expected to develop a coherent set of skills and behaviours

associated with a global mindset (McGinnis & Ostrom 2011; Seif, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). These evolving competencies respond to diverse societal transformations, including labour market demands, rapid technological advancements, and the urgent need to embrace shared values that promote collaboration, self-awareness, and an understanding of cultural and ecological interdependence.

Consequently, foreign language learning emerges as a multifaceted educational process that extends beyond the acquisition of linguistic proficiency to support the development of transversal competencies. Given the increasing urgency of environmental challenges, many of which are directly influenced by human behaviour, language education assumes an ethical dimension. In this light, foreign language teaching becomes not only a medium for cultural exchange but also a platform for fostering ecological consciousness and social responsibility (Ori, 2022). Additionally, sustainability can be embedded and interlinked with other disciplines across the curriculum in a STEAM approach. In the Romanian educational system, the transition towards sustainability values has been introduced in the form of a “Green Week” project that takes place every year in the context of formal education. Learners ranging from kindergarten to high school level are involved and take part in this compulsory programme (Romanian Ministry of Education, 2023).

Because learners need to be channelled toward being part of the green transition, the analytical report entitled *Teacher Education for the Green Transition and Sustainable Development* has stated that initial and continuous teacher training programmes are “the most significant catalysts for bringing innovation and sustainability into educational systems” (European Commission, 2023, p. 6). Teaching and learning for sustainability have become, according to the EU’s Council Recommendation, key priority areas in policies and programmes (European Commission, 2022a) concerned with developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Various reports and recommendations including the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), the European Union Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (European Commission, 2021), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization strategy Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 (UNESCO, 2020), Teacher education for the green transition and sustainable development (European Commission, 2023), the European biodiversity strategy (European Commission 2020a), the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (European Commission 2020b) and GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b) highlight the salient role that education has in engaging all the stakeholders (learners, teachers, parents, the wider community) in gaining awareness about the green transition. Still, more research is needed to explore the evolving role of educators as agents of social and environmental change (Bürgener & Barth, 2018; Weinberg et al., 2020) and to examine their readiness levels to incorporate sustainability topics into their teaching and curricula. Such a holistic approach would enforce changes in all the levels of edu-

cation, ranging from micro-level (individual teachers), to meso-level (institutions, curricula), and macro-levels (social and educational systems).

Recent studies in Finnish and Swedish educational contexts indicate that language teachers tend to incorporate fewer sustainability issues in their teaching compared to teachers teaching other topics (Borg et al., 2012; Sund & Gericke, 2020; Uitto & Saloranta, 2017). Additionally, the majority of teachers consider that climate change education should be taught by science teachers and not in foreign language teaching contexts (Howard-Jones et al., 2021). Other empirical research indicate that pre-service language teachers do not necessarily feel sufficiently competent to implement sustainability dimensions in their teaching (Maijala et al., 2023). In light of these numerous policies and recent studies, our research paper intends to investigate Romanian pre-service teachers' preparedness and willingness to integrate in their teaching of foreign languages a sustainable perspective of the environment.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

To address the new roles of teachers, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are foreign language pre-service teachers willing to integrate sustainability and ecological awareness into their future teaching practices?
2. To what extent are pre-service EFL and FFL teachers prepared to foster sustainable development through language instruction?
3. What challenges and opportunities do teachers identify in connecting language learning with sustainable development in education?

The framework for the research instrument employed in this paper is grounded in two policy actions. The first one is *Teacher Education for the Green Transition and Sustainable Development* (European Commission, 2023), a framework that provides the rationale for addressing sustainability in initial and continuous teacher professional development. The second one is GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b), issued by the European Union to map sustainable competencies. Together, they provide a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding the evolving role of educators in fostering sustainability-oriented competencies. Both policy actions emphasize transformative teaching approaches that support the integration of sustainability into all areas of instruction. In line with this principle, the survey conducted aimed to investigate pre-service foreign language teachers' willingness, perceived readiness, and attitudes regarding the incorporation of ecological themes and sustainability awareness into their future teaching practices. GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b), with its framework based on four competence areas, guided the structure of the questionnaire employed in this research.

The four areas with their descriptors (European Commission, 2022b, pp. 14–15) refer to:

- 1) embodying sustainability values (valuing sustainability, supporting fairness, promoting nature);
- 2) embracing complexity in sustainability (systems thinking, critical thinking, problem framing);
- 3) envisioning sustainable futures (futures literacy, adaptability, exploratory thinking);
- 4) acting for sustainability (political agency, individual initiative, collective action).

The Google form questionnaire tackled all four areas, but not all their descriptors.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

As pre-service teachers represent important stakeholders in shaping tomorrow's educational system, they are a salient target group, and their opinions on the prospects of infusing teaching and learning with a sustainable approach are valuable. The current study aims to investigate pre-service foreign language teachers' willingness and preparedness toward incorporating ecological themes and sustainability awareness into their teaching practices.

The research was conducted between February and March 2025 at the Faculty of Letters at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to offer a broader perspective on the respondents' views. The Google Forms questionnaire was sent via MS Teams to pre-service undergraduate students. Given the small number of respondents, the findings cannot be generalised. Still, the research is valuable for the Romanian context as it covers a gap in knowledge regarding Romanian pre-service teachers' views and willingness to incorporate ecological themes and sustainability awareness into their future teaching practices. In terms of representativity, it is relevant to mention that the respondents study various foreign languages, allowing for a broader perspective of understanding the context for addressing sustainability awareness in initial teacher professional development.

The target group comprised undergraduate students in their second and third years of study. All of them were enrolled in an elective teacher training programme. A total of 80 respondents provided valid answers to the survey based on convenience sampling. Responses were anonymous. Table 1 indicates respondents' profiles:

Table 1.
Respondents' profile

Participants	N	%
<i>Age</i>		
20	24	30
21	30	37.5
22	18	22.5
23	3	3.75
24	4	5
26	1	1.25
Total	80	100
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	76	95
Male	4	5
Total	80	100
<i>Mother tongue</i>		
Romanian	75	92.3
Hungarian	5	7.7
Total	80	100
<i>I would like to become a teacher</i>		
Yes	59	73.75
No	2	2.5
Maybe	19	23.75
Total	80	100
<i>Preferred level of learners</i>		
Primary level	12	15
Lower secondary level	20	25
Upper secondary level	41	51.25
Tertiary education	7	8.75
Total	80	100

Source: Authors' own study.

The gender distribution is unequal (female 95%, male 5%) because in Romania, females are more numerous as educators and are more likely to study at the Faculty of Letters in Cluj-Napoca. We have received the consent of respondents to participate in this research. As they are adults and according to the existing laws in Romania, no other approval was necessary. Participant confidentiality was strictly maintained.

A survey was used as the main research instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 29 items with a mix of 26 close-ended (multiple choice and Likert scale) and 3 open-ended questions organized into five main sections grounded in the four competence areas proposed by GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b): Section 1 – Demographic details and respondents' profile (age, gender, mother tongue, willingness to become a teacher); Section 2 – Respondents' interest in

knowing more about environmental issues (interaction with nature; familiarity with the concept of sustainability; selective waste collection); Section 3 – Understanding sustainable development policies (climate neutrality; GreenComp; European Green Deal); Section 4 – Background for ecological education (ecological literacy; adaptability; responsible behaviour; climate anxiety); Section 5 – Benefits and challenges of introducing eco-themes in teaching a foreign language (individual initiative; address environmental issues; motivate students to care about the environment; inclusion of sustainability topics in teaching). The questionnaire was formulated in English. The quantitative data obtained were analysed through descriptive statistics using Google Forms' built-in tools and Jamovi® software, version 2.3.21, while content analysis was processed using Voyant Tools (www.voyant.org). The statistics for the Likert scale data (ranging from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*) determined that Cronbach's alpha = .77, which indicates that the survey has an internal consistency of 0.77. Considering the value of Cronbach's alpha, our study instrument is reliable and has an acceptable internal consistency. Concerning descriptive statistics, mean scores range from 1.98 to 4.41, while standard deviations range from 0.67 to 1.55.

RESULTS

The analysis focuses on different sections of the questionnaire and indicates findings concerning the research questions addressed in this study. As previously mentioned, the questionnaire sections were guided by the four competence areas proposed by GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b). The first competence area tackled respondents' interest in knowing more about nature and environmental issues. Regarding interacting with nature, 56.25% of the respondents strongly agree that nature plays an important role in their development, while 30% agree with this statement. Only 11.25% are undecided, and 2.5% disagree (totally disagree) with this statement. All respondents interact with nature mostly during their walks in the park, visits to the botanical gardens or day trips in the city and surroundings. The respondents (60%) admit that they are not involved in environmental protection actions carried out through volunteer programmes. Still, they perform selective waste collection for plastic packaging (63%) and paper (52%), demonstrating knowledge and awareness of sustainability. The second competence area investigated respondents' knowledge of various sustainable development policies. Findings indicate that only 32.5% of the respondents are familiar with the concept while 45% are slightly familiar. In terms of awareness about the European Green Deal the respondents (62%) indicated a lack of knowledge about it. Only 28.8% of the respondents were aware of the European Union's climate neutrality project. In addition, almost all respondents (95%) are

not familiar with the guidelines proposed by GreenComp issued in 2022. These results indicate that teacher training programmes need to integrate into their curriculum topics related to sustainability so that pre-service teachers demonstrate awareness of integrating ecological awareness into their future teaching practices. These pre-service teachers can apply for a teaching position in one or two academic years. Still, their level of knowledge related to policy actions in the area sustainability needs to be enhanced. The courses taught in the teacher training programmes should be infused with examples and projects that provide good teaching practices to support sustainable development.

The third competence area relates to knowledge about ecological education. To further understand the educational needs of respondents, the research addressed their previous connections to ecology and sustainability. Respondents from both groups indicate that ecological education was included in compulsory education in subjects related to geography, technological education, and foreign languages. Starting with 2023, the Romanian Ministry of Education created a project run during compulsory education entitled Green Week (Romanian Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 1). This project, with a duration of five working days, allows learners in all schools in Romania to become more knowledgeable about protecting the environment and creating a safe place for both humans and animals. Out of the total number of respondents, the majority of them consider that the project Green Week can develop eco-responsible behaviour (94%), enhance recycling habits (92%), and raise awareness regarding the protection of nature (91%). This national project is already in force in Romania, and its implementation is carried out by teachers who teach various subjects. As indicated in the theoretical framework, teachers of foreign languages need to broaden their duties and incorporate into their language learning perspectives on sustainable development.

The concept of ecocriticism is tightly connected to ecological awareness and sustainable development. According to Yadava and Sinhaa (2024), it comprises “various critical methodologies that investigate the connection between humans and the natural world in the literature and other cultural expressions” (p. 2). Research, literature and other publications on the topic of ecocriticism have increased notably since 2014 (Yadava & Sinhaa, 2024, p. 19). Therefore, it was relevant for this research to inquire respondents concerning the contact they had at the university level as part of their compulsory syllabus with books connected to ecocriticism. Findings indicate that 78% of the respondents did not have included in their syllabus for different subjects topics related to ecocriticism. The percentages are slightly the same for reading books connected to ecocriticism: 81% of the respondents do not read out of their free will books on this topic. The overwhelmingly negative responses require a deeper inquiry to further understand the respondents’ willingness to address sustainability in their teaching as an outcome of their responsible behaviour.

The fourth competence area included in the survey refers to the perceived benefits and challenges of introducing sustainability themes in teaching a foreign language. Table 2 below indicates the results for three items taken from this competence area.

Table 2.
Benefits of including sustainability in teaching foreign languages

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>Sd</i>	<i>N</i>
Q1. Do you think that including sustainability themes in EFL classes could motivate students to care about the environment?	4.42	0.87	80
Q2. I believe that including sustainability-related topics would not be helpful as it would reduce the time allocated to teaching the foreign language	2.09	1.05	80
Q3. I believe that including sustainable development topics in EFL classes is not relevant to learners	1.76	1.02	80

Source: Authors' own study.

Findings indicate that respondents are confident about including sustainability topics in foreign language classes to motivate learners to care about the environment. They disagree ($M = 2.09$) or lean heavily toward disagreement ($M = 1.76$) with the statement that such topics would reduce the time allocated to teaching the foreign language.

As regards the curriculum, respondents identify as the most suitable topics for incorporating sustainability development to be the means of transport (80%), the electronic devices (75%), food (68%) and consumption (furniture and clothing) (72%). The high scores indicate that pre-service teachers are knowledgeable about the curriculum and the possibility of including topics related to sustainable development.

Sustainability and ecological awareness can be addressed in the formal educational context at different levels, considering age and context appropriacy. Asked to indicate the suitable educational level for incorporating environmental issues, the group of pre-service teachers of English indicated the primary level (53%), followed by the kindergarten level (28%). These scores indicate that pre-service teachers are aware that educating pupils from an early age is beneficial for developing their environmental awareness. As a consequence, respondents are confident (62%) and very confident (34%) that they are going to include sustainability topics in their in-service teaching practice.

The qualitative insights from this study provide further depth to the findings regarding pre-service readiness and willingness to incorporate sustainability topics in their teaching of foreign languages. The open-ended item ("What do you think are the benefits of including ecological themes in EFL classes in relation

to the development of communication skills?”) underwent content analysis via Voyant Tools. The corpus created contained a total of 1 108 words. The most relevant frequent words in the corpus were: sustainability (17 instances), vocabulary (14 instances), ecology (12 instances), language (9 instances), communication (8 instances), environment (8 instances), school (5 instances), topics (4 instances), critical thinking (4 instances). To showcase respondents’ opinions on this topic, we include below five word-for-word examples:

I think that including eco-themes in EFL classes would expand students’ vocabulary and would encourage them to analyze problems, think critically and express their opinions. Furthermore, including eco-themes would also help students to improve their speaking and listening skills by discussing and working in groups.

Boost communication skills by fostering discussions, teamwork, and vocabulary growth, making learning more engaging.

It invites students to talk about a relevant topic, while also practicing their vocabulary. It can encourage them to express their opinion.

Discussing environmental issues often involves analyzing problems and suggesting solutions. This enhances persuasive communication skills, as students learn to support their arguments with evidence.

Encouraging meaningful discussions, expanding vocabulary and promoting critical thinking.

The bulk of answers provided by respondents indicate that pre-service teachers have found various benefits in including ecological themes in their teaching of foreign languages. They have indicated enhancement of vocabulary, development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and engagement in collaborative tasks. These are in fact relevant skills to be developed in the 21st-century educational context.

The open-ended item (“What do you think are the disadvantages of including ecological themes in EFL classes in relation to the development of communication skills?”) underwent content analysis via Voyant Tools. The corpus created contained a total of 771 words. The most relevant frequent words in the corpus were: *disadvantages* (20 instances), *motivation* (17 instances), *understand/understanding* (12 instances), *language* (7 instances), *topics* (6 instances), and *school* (5 instances). To showcase respondents’ opinions on this topic, we include below five word-for-word answers:

In my opinion eco-themes often include specific/complex vocabulary or concepts that might be challenging for some learners.

No disadvantages.

Disadvantages of including ecological themes in EFL classes include potential confusion due to unfamiliar vocabulary, limited exposure to diverse topics, and decreased motivation if the themes aren't relevant to students.

Depending on the age group, some students might find the topic boring and they may not want to participate.

Not all students are passionate about environmental issues, which could result in a lack of motivation to participate in class discussions or complete tasks related to the topic.

The bulk of answers provided by respondents indicate that pre-service teachers have found few disadvantages or none. Still, in the responses above, some drawbacks are indicated that are linked to specialized vocabulary, lack of motivation, or age appropriateness. By indicating such drawbacks, pre-service teachers demonstrate awareness of the language learning context and classroom management skills.

DISCUSSION

The first research question was intended to investigate pre-service teachers' willingness to integrate sustainability awareness into their future teaching practices. In this respect, findings indicate that even though respondents are moderately familiar with the concept of sustainability and with the various policy actions that support the development of environmental awareness and sustainable competence, 86.25% of the respondents agree that nature plays an important role in their development and life. In this regard, they perform selective waste collection for plastic and paper packaging, demonstrating knowledge of responsible behaviour towards people, animals, and the environment. Their willingness to integrate sustainability into their teaching with the purpose of motivating students to care about the environment is supported by evidence by the high percentages assigned to this item ($M = 4.42$). They disagree ($M = 2.09$) or lean heavily toward disagreement ($M = 1.76$) with the statement that such themes would reduce the time allocated to teaching the foreign language. In addition, respondents are confident (96%) that such topics are going to be beneficial to learners who study a foreign language and they were able to identify suitable topics in the curriculum for incorporating sustainability development. This indicates their willingness to incorporate this perspective into their teaching practice.

The second research question investigated pre-service teachers' preparedness to foster sustainable development through language instruction. Findings indicate that when asked to self-evaluate their knowledge of sustainable development,

respondents are familiar (32.5%) and slightly familiar (45%) with the concept. However, respondents rarely read research, books, and other documents related to ecocriticism and sustainability issues. In addition, they are not knowledgeable of the GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b) directions for developing sustainable competence. In light of these findings, it could be argued that their level of preparedness should be improved.

The third research question aimed to investigate pre-service teachers' opinions on the challenges and opportunities of connecting language learning with sustainable development in the context of foreign language teaching. In this respect, findings indicate that respondents have found various benefits and some drawbacks related to including ecological themes in their teaching of foreign languages. By indicating such details, pre-service teachers demonstrate awareness of the particularities of foreign language teaching, demonstrate classroom management skills, and critical thinking.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore pre-service teachers' perspectives on integrating sustainability into foreign language education, focusing on their willingness, preparedness, and perceived challenges and opportunities in doing so. Firstly, the findings reveal a strong willingness among pre-service teachers to incorporate sustainability awareness into their future teaching practices. Despite moderate levels of familiarity with sustainability concepts and related policy actions, an overwhelming majority acknowledged the importance of nature in their personal development. Their commitment to environmentally responsible behaviors, such as selective waste collection, further supports this inclination. Respondents expressed their intention to include sustainability topics in their language classes, motivated by the belief that such integration would positively influence learners. Secondly, while there is evident motivation, the respondents reported moderate familiarity with sustainable development and low engagement with academic resources focused on sustainability. Moreover, there is limited awareness of policy actions such as the EU's GreenComp (European Commission, 2022b), highlighting a need for targeted training and curriculum design that explicitly integrates sustainability education into language teacher training programs. Therefore, their level of preparedness to foster sustainable development through language instruction needs to be improved.

The respondents' reflections on the challenges and opportunities of integrating ecological themes into language teaching underscore their pedagogical awareness. Likewise, they were able to articulate both the strong points and limitations of such integration, demonstrating a capacity for critical analysis, classroom management

insight, and critical thinking. In conclusion, the study highlights a crucial duality: while pre-service teachers' willingness is high, their preparedness is still evolving. The potential for pre-service language teachers to become active agents of sustainable development is evident. Still, this potential must be guided by curriculum innovation, professional development, and increased exposure to interdisciplinary resources. As an outcome, teachers will feel empowered not only to teach a foreign language but also to educate for a more sustainable future.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The small number of respondents taking part in this research makes the findings unsuitable for generalisation. Still, the findings are valuable for the Romanian educational arena because they can inform policy makers of the need to integrate in teacher training programmes topics related to sustainability development. Likewise, pre-service teachers are going to be better equipped for addressing environmental topics in their teaching and will develop their sustainable competencies. This research could gain more depth if the number of respondents were higher and if gender variation and various foreign languages taught in Romania would be considered. It would be advantageous to investigate whether female vs. male preferences differ in incorporating environmental topics in teaching foreign languages.

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GOTOWOŚĆ PRZYSZŁYCH NAUCZYCIELI DO ZAJĘCIA SIĘ ZRÓWNOWAŻONYM ROZWOJEM W NAUCZANIU JĘZYKÓW OBCYCH W RUMUNII

Wprowadzenie: Różne działania polityczne podkreślają pilną potrzebę opracowania wspólnej wizji wyposażenia nauczycieli i uczniów w wiedzę i umiejętności, aby mogli włączyć zrównoważony rozwój do swojego nauczania.

Cel badań: Niniejsze badania mają na celu omówienie gotowości przyszłych nauczycieli do uwzględnienia w swoim nauczaniu zagadnień środowiskowych języka angielskiego i francuskiego w celu rozwijania świadomości zrównoważonego rozwoju u uczniów. Biorąc pod uwagę odpowiedzialność, jaką edukatorzy mają wobec przyszłych pokoleń uczniów, konieczna jest zmiana postawy i zachowania w odniesieniu do środowiska, w którym żyjemy. Ponieważ w Rumunii obecny stan znajomości środowiska jest na początkowym poziomie, niniejszy dokument ma na celu zbadanie gotowości przyszłych nauczycieli języka angielskiego i francuskiego do przyjęcia roli agentów zmian.

Metoda badań: W badaniu wzięło udział 80 uczestników, a ankieta została wykorzystana jako narzędzie badawcze. Zebrane dane zostały przeanalizowane jakościowo i ilościowo za pomocą statystyk opisowych przy użyciu wbudowanych narzędzi Google Forms, Jamovi 2.6.26 i Voyant Tools do analizy treści.

Wyniki: Główne ustalenia odnoszą się do faktu, że nawet jeśli nauczyciele-amatorzy są skłonni zająć się zrównoważonym rozwojem w swoim nauczaniu, ich poziom przygotowania powinien zostać poprawiony.

Wnioski: Potencjał nauczycieli języków obcych do stania się aktywnymi agentami zrównoważonego rozwoju jest oczywisty. Niemniej jednak potencjał ten musi być ukierunkowany przez innowację w programie nauczania, rozwój zawodowy i zwiększoną ekspozycję na zasoby interdyscyplinarne.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, świadomość ekologiczna, przyszli nauczyciele, nauczanie języków obcych, zielone umiejętności, znajomość zagadnień środowiskowych, ekokrytyka