

The Implementation of Sustainability Practices in Arab Higher Education Institutions

Abstract

Purpose

This paper explores how sustainability practices were implemented in a higher education institution within a local setting in the Gulf and Arab Emirates Region. This study examined the impact of social and cultural requirements on the development of the master plan for the New Kuwait University campus with regards to sustainability to illustrate how current social and cultural requirements impact the design of a future learning environment whilst highlighting the essential role of organisational actors in this implementation process.

Design/methodology/approach

Employing an in-depth case study approach, we conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with educators and administrative staff who had been involved in the sustainability implementation process at Kuwait university. These participants were involved at different stages in the implementation of a major sustainability project at Kuwait university. The interviews were further supplemented by analysing supporting documents and communications.

Findings

Our analysis reveals that sustainability was embedded in a narrative that was repeated at the practice level; this directed the setting of objectives for the project and its various sub-tasks. It also helped actors to develop their understandings of practice and the importance of social emotions, self-intentions, and patterns of culture in the process. The study further reveals that participants mainly focused on environmental issues regarding, saving paper/electricity, and overlooked aspects of a wider concepts and core values of sustainability and there is a significant amount of lack of knowledge and awareness on matters about sustainability, especially with the understanding of its definition.

Originality/value

The study draws on practice-organization framework employed by Schatzki (2002, 2010), suggesting that sustainability implementation is a process led by rules, practical understanding, general understanding, and teleoaffective structures, to highlight the role of agency and change among various actors in implementing sustainability. A practice-theory framing is used to signpost the roles played by various actors in establishing goals and tasks for the project while taking account of local understanding and independence in the implementation of sustainability practices. Engaging with Practice theory framework offers us theoretical basis that is fundamentally different from the theories of interaction-oriented approaches in sustainable design

Keywords: sustainability, practice theory, higher education, culture, emotions.

1. Introduction

Universities are dynamic institutions that have been leading changes within their communities on initiatives to integrate and promote sustainability practices (Ferrer-Balas et al., 2008; Shiel and Williams, 2015). The importance of their initiatives extends beyond the institutions themselves as the students they educate become future leaders and decision-makers responsible for the sustainability policies that researchers and activists demand (Holm et al., 2015). The World Commission on the Environment Report defined sustainable development as the advancement that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"¹. As a result, more universities are integrating sustainability concepts into their research, curriculums, institutional frameworks, and day-to-day activities; they are creating eco-friendly campuses and prioritising the teaching and research of sustainability issues (Sterling, 2004; Lozano, 2006; Lozano et al., 2013; Wals, 2014). As well as the intrinsic motivations for implementing sustainability practices, universities face external pressures to show commitment toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, the world's first University Impact Rankings were launched in 2019 to measure and rank HE institutes' success in delivering the SDGs. The third edition of this ranking in 2021 includes 1,118 global universities from 94 countries. Such rankings indicate the University's dedication to SDGs and Sustainability and can be used as a marketing tool by universities to attract environmentally conscious students.

Lozano et al. (2013) and Moggi (2019) note that implementing change in universities is one strategy for introducing social and technological innovations in sustainability. Evans et al. (2015) and Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar (2008) emphasise that university campuses are like small towns, where new development and social innovation can be introduced before they are expanded outside the campus area. However, not much research has examined the implementation of sustainability practices in local university settings within the social and environmental accounting literature (Al Mahameed et al., 2021; Waas et al., 2010). We address this topic and the need to examine the role of local communities in implementing sustainability concepts and practices at the institutional level by studying how the sustainability process impacts a university community. We focus on a single case study involving a Higher Education (HE) organisation in Kuwait to examine how sustainability is implemented in Practice.

Previous studies have focused on the barriers that hinder the implementation of sustainability policies and practices within higher education - using specific case studies or examining a group of educational organisations. Such studies typically refer to a specific model to aid in analysing the data collected (Avila et al., 2017; Vagnoni and Cavicchi, 2015; Levy and Marans, 2012; Jorge et al., 2014; Elliot and Wright, 2013). For instance, Dyball et al. (2015) studied the attitudes and views of employees in an Australian University toward implementing sustainability. The purpose was to examine the relationship between the lack of employee participation in implementing a sustainability-based strategy and the barriers to a successful organisational change. The present study is similar to Dyball et al.'s (2015) research concerning its focus on the views of educators and top management on the issue of sustainability implementation. Unlike Dyball et al. (2015), however, we do not use the 'notion of ambivalence' to analyse interviewees' responses and identify the source of staff resistance by attempting to construct an overall picture of staff attitudes towards the notion of sustainability implementation in the HE sector.

¹ (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8).

The study aims to examine the impact of social and cultural requirements on developing a master plan for the New Kuwait University campus in terms of its sustainability to demonstrate how current social and cultural requirements impact the design of a future learning environment. To achieve this aim, we took an in-depth case study approach using semi-structured interviews with educators and administrative staff involved in the sustainability implementation process; these interviews were supplemented by document analysis. This study draws on practice theory to highlight the role of agency and change among various actors in implementing sustainability. A practice-theory framing is used to understand each individual's perspective, attitudes, and values while revealing the difficulties faced during the implementation process (Hargreaves, 2011). We adopted the practice-organisation framework employed by Schatzki (2002, 2010), suggesting that sustainability implementation is a process led by rules, practical understanding, general understanding, and teleoaffective structures². Using Practice theory, we recognise that "phenomena such as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science power, language, social institutions, and human transformation occurs within and are aspects or components of the field of practices" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 2). The finding reveals a lack of knowledge and awareness regarding sustainability. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that participants are mostly absorbed with environmental issues while ignoring broader notions and core values of sustainability. This requires universities in Kuwait to create and implement specific awareness strategies to achieve sustainability goals.

Sustainable development is a key driver of national strategies (Labanauskis, 2017, Chiba et al., 2018). In recent years, governments have been pressured to improve their sustainability performance at all levels (Adams et al., 2014). The government has responded to this pressure in Kuwait by creating a master plan and vision for 2035 called New Kuwait (New Kuwait Summit, 2019). One project that forms part of the Kuwait 2035 vision is Kuwait University's new campus. To understand the integration of Sustainability within Kuwaiti HE and Kuwait University's new campus, the study interviews faculty members who were key participants in the committees responsible for creating the new campus. The practical implications contribute to the decision-making process in the HE organisational setting. The results of this research will interest stakeholders of universities and other policymakers in the Gulf and Arab Emirates Region and universities around the world.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes relevant literature on sustainability and the Kuwaiti context. Section 3 presents the relevant literature on sustainability and the theoretical framework. Section 4 details the methods used in our study; it explains the data collection and analysis process. Section 5 reports on the results from the interviews and summarises the research findings. Finally, section 6 discusses the study's implications and outlines the conclusions.

² Schatzki (2002) defines teleoaffective structures as "a range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods (p. 80).

2. Situating Sustainability Practices

2.1 The Concept of Sustainability

The concept of sustainability is broad and varied and is commonly presented within three pillars: environmental, social, and economic (Gladwin et al., 1995; Gao and Bansal, 2013; Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). However, splitting the concept within these three broad buckets assume that these concepts are not interconnected.

Understanding and applying sustainability can be complicated, expensive, and demanding. Since sustainability is an all-encompassing concept, it is crucial to understand its meaning with reference to the context and purpose of bringing about effective change for achieving sustainability objectives. The simplicity or complexity of understanding the concept (and subsequently implementing it) can be as simple or complex given a specific context. The context here becomes imperative to drive engagement and effort as, depending on the underlying rationale of sustainability, success will be defined differently in different contexts. Therefore, organisations may engage in sustainability activities and projects depending on the context and rationale of such activities. For instance, profit-oriented sustainability management approves sustainability initiatives only if they positively affect their financial performance (Ameer and Othman, 2012; Gao and Bansal, 2013; Schaltegger and Hörisch, 2017). This is especially true for small and medium-sized businesses (Revell et al., 2010).

Interestingly, studies have also highlighted variations in the conceptual understanding of sustainability from region to region, implying that, as well as the environmental, social, and economic dimensions mentioned above, the regional dimension is also essential in understanding the concept of sustainability. González et al. (2021) argue that there are further considerations, such as political, ethical, and legal dimensions, that are the characteristics of the concept itself. Time and space, as well as cultural and spiritual convictions, also imply its conceptualisation. Due to its abstract and complex nature, the concept of sustainability remains ambiguous, complex, and open to interpretation (see Frame, 2008 and Ferraro et al., 2015). In line with studies such as Ivory and MacKay (2020), we base our understanding of Sustainability on Bansal's (2005) conceptualisation based on economic prosperity, social equality and cohesion, and environmental integrity. This broad view of sustainability which focuses on economic, social, and environmental issues, is reported in the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Peloza et al., 2012). From a university's perspective, we define sustainability as a constantly evolving concept reflected in its core objectives and embedded within its institutional mission, public engagement, leadership, research, Practice and operations, pedagogy, and curricula across disciplines.

Evidence suggests that commitment to sustainability varies among organisations that approach sustainability in several ways, from marketing and communication perspectives to financing and spending decisions. The literature describes this perspective as a continuum from peripheral embeddedness of sustainability to substantive embeddedness (Hyatt and Berente, 2017; Ivory and MacKay, 2020; Martinez, 2021). From a peripheral frame of reference, the organisation's actions will adopt "less bad" strategies such as reducing emissions and resources and saving costs. Such

organisations implement (or engage with) sustainability solely to increase their economic benefit (Schaltegger and Hörisch, 2017). The literature also suggests that legitimacy-seeking reputational concerns and brand value are also important drivers of sustainability practices (Deegan, 2002; van Marrewijk, 2003; Cho and Patten, 2007; O'Dwyer et al. 2011; Pellegrino and Lodhia, 2012)

Ivory and MacKay (2020) document three approaches individuals may take to steer their organisations toward sustainability. The assimilation approach focuses primarily on cost savings and achieving efficiencies; the Mobilisation approach involves reaching out to senior management and initiating pilot sustainability projects, and the Transition approach primarily focuses on policy changes, adapting processes and transforming attitudes and behaviours, and embedding sustainability into integral company policies, metrics, recruitment and key performance indicators (KPIs). This study highlights that integrating sustainability within the organisation's business model is a long-term venture, and support from senior management is the key. The authors claim that internal policies and metrics are essential in integrating sustainability. While the research has examined the role of individuals in driving sustainability (or scaling sustainability) within organisations, the focus has been on leaders or senior management (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Peters and Romi, 2014; Young et al., 2015; Walls and Berrone, 2017; Ivory and MacKay, 2020). In the current paper and interviewing the management, we spoke with academics. It is widely accepted that businesses and powerful institutions (such as universities) are critical in the transition toward a sustainable economy, given their influence and control in our societies (Gray and Milne, 2004; Schneider, 2015; Al Mahameed et al., 2022). Exploring the implementation of sustainability practices in an increasingly competitive higher education sector within a local setting will shed light on the roles of a range of actors and how their involvement influences existing practices, decisions, and direction of the institute. In doing so, we critically analysed the perspectives of management and academics in developing and implementing policies and strategies for sustainable practices. We also explore the current changes made in the policy, Practice, and curricula in light of Kuwait's cultural and organisational context.

2.2 The HE Vision

Kuwait is a Middle Eastern country located in the Arabian Gulf. It is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and is ruled by a monarch from the Al Sabah family (or Emir) with a democratic constitution (Kuwait Government Online, 2020). Murning (2006), on the development of university campuses in the West, notes that we are now in what has been described as the fourth phase in the evolution of buildings for tertiary education. Several developing countries are constructing university campuses to accommodate their population's growing need for university education (Mahgoub, 2009). Several Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, established governmental universities during the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. Many of these universities were built on sites previously occupied by high schools, whereas others were constructed entirely on new sites as complete university campuses. For instance, the Kuwait and United Arab Emirates universities utilised existing school buildings, while King Abdul Aziz and Um-Al-Qura universities started in newly designed and constructed campuses. Kuwait's new development plan, 'New Kuwait,' is a vision for the year 2035, in which the country is transformed into an economic hub following investment in tourism, infrastructure, technology, and renewable energy (The Business Year, 2018).

One of the 135 projects included under the New Kuwait plan in Kuwait University's New Campus, known as Sabah Al-Salem University City (New Kuwait, 2020). In 2004, a decree was issued to build a new university city that would include all colleges and scientific centres in the Al-Shedadiya Area (Sabah Al-Salem University City, 2020)³. However, Kuwait University City experienced several delays that hindered the process and resulted in the project's postponement. The State Audit Bureau drove the project forward faster toward completion after finding the hindering factors by doing their jobs and responsibilities as accountants to monitor the project. Throughout the process, there were frequent reports and presentations explaining the status of the projects. The project delay was due to 15 main reasons, as stated by the Kuwait Audit Bureau⁴.

3. Sustainability Implementation and Social Practice

Recently there has been a shift in most universities' visions and missions due to external pressures to incorporate sustainability into education, research, campus building, and facilities; especially over the last two decades when the concept of sustainable development has become a vital component of a country's national strategy. This shift has been influenced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Labanauskis, 2017). For instance, in Japan and Sweden, government regulations significantly influence universities' decisions to integrate sustainability into their activities (Evangelinos et al., 2009; Ferrer-Balas et al., 2008; Sammalisto and Arvidsson, 2005). Since universities significantly influence society and can affect future generations through the students they educate, they are a key element when introducing and promoting sustainability within a nation (Sitkin, 2013; Klein et al., 2022). Shiel et al. (2016) studied universities from the UK, Germany, Portugal, and Brazil and concluded that universities contribute significantly to a society's development. The authors suggested that university engagement should be prioritised when implementing sustainability strategies. Velazques et al. (2005) stated that universities could enhance sustainability through education, research, community activities, and campus sustainability. However, implementing sustainability has been challenging for universities as it requires a change in culture, practices, policies, and awareness of one's environmental surroundings (Dyball et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2005). Levy and Marans (2012) focussed on the University of Michigan as a case study and suggested that introducing sustainability required a change of culture within the institution. Other studies have examined barriers to implementing

³ All Kuwait University projects were placed under the control of the Kuwait University Construction Program (KUCP) through the N.148 decree on 2001 (Sabah Al-Salem University City, 2020). Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City planned for about 40,000 students and was the responsibility of KUCP (Sabah Al-Salem University City, 2020). KUCP hired a highly experienced and qualified international project management firm to plan, design and construct all the phases of this project, which KUCP oversaw (Sabah Al-Salem University City, 2020). The College of Education (COE) is one of the colleges that was completed and became fully operational at the beginning of 2019. COE is 105,690 square meters in size and has 4,050 students and 395 faculty members and staff. It consists of five department and a five-floor building that has classrooms, a library, lecture halls, a cafeteria, and research spaces all with smart sustainable teaching technology (Sabah Al-Salem University City, 2020).

⁴ Lack of an integrated strategic plan with the university administration to achieve the goals of Law No. 30 of 2004, the lack of clarity of the vision of the university administration regarding the components of the Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City, the large number of amendments to the designs of the various colleges as a result of the lack of clarity of requirements, large number of requests from the beneficiaries, or the increase in the absorptive capacity, and the delay in completing the final designs and offering documents, resulting in the delay in starting the implementation of colleges and facilities, and the overlap of the abilities and diversity of decision-making bodies and committees at the university on issues related to the design and implementation of colleges and buildings of Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City (Alwatan, 2015).

sustainability in universities (Bekessy et al., 2007; Reid and Petocz, 2006; Tilbury et al., 2005; Velazquez et al., 2005). For example, Ávila et al. (2017) studied the barriers to innovation and sustainable development in universities worldwide. The authors found that a lack of knowledge and support from the university administration, a dearth of technology, resource scarcity, and institutional resistance were barriers to adopting sustainability practices. Evangelinos et al. (2009), Tilbury et al. (2005), and Velazquez et al. (2005) found that the stakeholder groups affected the extent to which universities implemented sustainability processes; a lack of commitment and participation was seen as a hindrance towards achieving long-term goals in the sustainability area. Vagnoni and Cavicchi (2015) examined sustainability practices in Italian public universities and concluded that most institutions studied addressed the internal pressures concerning sustainability in a fragmented manner. Jorge et al. (2014) studied the implementation of Sustainability in Spanish Universities and identified that to succeed; effective management had to be convinced that sustainable changes were crucial and needed. Using interview findings from the presidents of 27 Canadian university student unions, Elliot and Wright (2013) found that the most challenging obstacle to implementing sustainability policies in universities was restrictions on financial resources; without funding, sustainability policies were generally unsuccessful. Therefore, several challenges have been identified in the literature relating to implementing sustainability practices at universities, which are influenced by factors such as culturally embedded norms, socio-economic context, institutional expectations, management incompetence, and lack of resources.

3.1 Symbolic Meanings and Skills

According to Cebrian et al. (2015), staff commitment is key to the successful implementation of sustainability policies in universities; academics usually have some control over their research and teaching (Dearlove, 1998), and they have to engage with change to university policy. However, some faculty and staff have difficulty understanding the complexity of the sustainability concept; others are in the early stages of their careers, concentrating on other things (Mulder et al., 2012). However, academics are significant to the success of any organisational change (Levin and Greenwood, 2001) because universities rely on such individuals (Leicht, 2013). According to Disterheft et al. (2016), some studies have examined the participation of faculty members in sustainability implementation within universities. For example, Saleh et al. (2011) stated that administration and faculty members play a pivotal role in successfully implementing university sustainability practices. The administration is represented on sustainability committees responsible for understanding the issues, visions, concepts, and plans for implementing sustainability and monitoring progress after the goals have been set. Vagnoni and Cavicchi (2015) analysed the university administration bodies to determine the sustainability vision and policies and how sustainability concepts are promoted. Further studies by Wright (2009), Wright and Horst (2013), and Wright and Wilton (2012) have found that university management knows about the core concepts of sustainability but lacks a deeper understanding of what is meant by a sustainable university and its practices.

Previous studies by Aznar-Minguet et al. (2011) and Lozano-Garcia et al. (2009) have established that faculty and staff were willing to incorporate sustainability concepts in different functions but lacked the essential training and knowledge to implement these concepts (Al-Mahameed and Riaz, 2019). Interestingly, a Malaysian study of local universities has shown that although staff lacked knowledge about sustainability, they were nonetheless willing to integrate sustainability within

their roles and learn more about it in the process (Derahim et al., 2012). However, a case study at a Chinese university concluded that the staff and faculty believed their role was not very significant and therefore had a low level of awareness about Sustainability (Yuan et al., 2013). By contrast, European studies have found that staff and faculty members are actively aware of their significant role in sustainability implementation in universities (Barth and Rieckmann, 2012).

3.2 Framing Sustainability Implementation

Hargreaves (2011) states that theories of Practice provide an all-inclusive conceptualisation of social practices. Theories of Practice can be applied to various processes and subjects, but it has been noticeably valuable in sustainable consumption studies (Cohen et al., 2013; Kennedy et al., 2015; Shove and Spurling, 2013; Warde et al., 2017). Recent studies have combined sustainability transitions with theories of Practice, such as Crivits and Paredis (2013) and McMeekin and Southerton (2012). Theodore R. Schatzki (1996 to 2010), a leading theorist of Practice, devoted this work to examining, understanding, and reasoning corporate governance practices through theories of Practice (Stacchezzini et al., 2020) – a perspective the present study employs. This theory has been hugely popular in social sciences disciplines, and an increasing amount of literature has been applying Schatzki's theory to provide in-depth analysis of accounting and risk management processes (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Jørgensen and Messner, 2010; Nama and Lowe, 2014; Bui et al., 2019). According to Schatzki (2001), "the status of human beings as subjects (and agents) is bound to practices" (p.20). This requires transferring the contents and properties of mind, cognition, and individual intentional action from the understanding of social life: "Human agency must . . . be understood as something contained in practices (i.e., as the performance of doings and sayings that constitute the actions that compose practices)" (Schatzki 2002, p. 240).

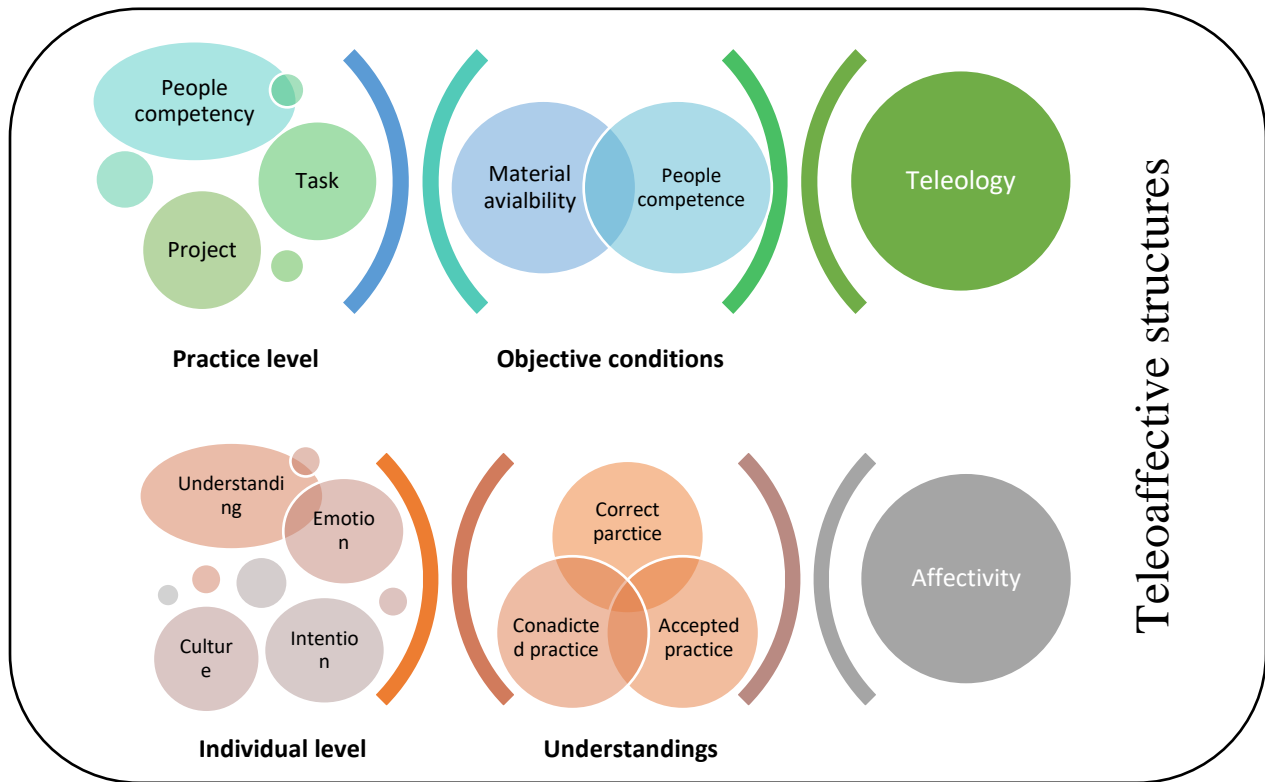
Schatzki's practice theory of agency comes to the main central question: how do we theorise practices in relation to agency and change? The critical challenge for practice theory is explaining how practices remain the same and change (Certeau,1984). Schatzki (2002) notes "that change comes about through agency" and raises fundamental questions about how agency and change can be theorised within the intellectual genealogy of practice theory (p. 235). Schatzki's (2002, 2010) 'practice organisation framework' describes practices as sets of actions linked through and organised by four principles, also labelled "properties" or "dimensions" as follows: practical understanding, general understandings, rules, and teleoffective structures. The practical understanding was described as the ability of a person to know how to do, identify and respond to an action (Schatzki, 2002; Stacchezzini et al., 2020). Schatzki notes that "practical understandings alone rarely determine action, except for "disperse practices" or such simple actions typically organised only through practical understanding as acts of describing, ordering, explaining, and reporting". He further elaborates that "integrative practices entail multiple actions, projects, and emotions. (p. 88) and usually requires other organising properties. The general understanding is described by Schatzki (2002) as the way the agents act regarding their attitude. Rules are created to facilitate a specific action and control the agent's actions, typically known as laws, rules of thumb, or implicit rules. Rules do not determine what people do; rather, what people do, determines what following rules amounts to" (Schatzki, 1996, p. 298). However, similar to practical understanding, rules "only intermittently and never simpliciter determine what people specifically do" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 60). Teleoffective structures are composed of two

components: teleology and affectivity. Teleology is the objective of the action, while affectivity refers to the emotions about the action (Schatzki, 2002). In other words, it is the intentions, beliefs, and expectations regarding a specific process (in this case, sustainability implementation).

We introduce in figure 1 teleoaffective structures proposed by Schatzki (2002), which include two sub-structures: first, teleology, in which the goals in performing a practice conceptualise under the practice level. This level entails the project where the vision is embedded, then the task, which is a means to achieve the vision based on the people's competency. Second, individual and understanding levels constitute the effectivity, where accepted or prescribed emotions and moods are manifested. Figure 1 depicts the teleoaffective structure proposed by Schatzki (2002) as a range of "normativised and hierarchal order ends, projects and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativised emotions and even moods" (p. 80). Schatzki (2005) elaborates that: practices are not static; "they evolve as circumstances change, opportunities and problems arise, personnel changes, new ideas arise, and so on" (p. 475).

Moreover, the actions that constitute practices are intertwined with "material entities" (Schatzki, 2002, p. 16). These material entities facilitate such practices to 'transpire' and work with them to frame the social order (Schatzki, 2005). Hence, we use the Schatzki (2002) framework, also employed by Stacchezzini et al. (2020), in aiding the analysis of the interview to understand practices towards sustainability implementation. However, practice theory applied in studies focuses on the social and collective practices instead of the individual; therefore, it unfolds behavioural changes in attitudes and values (Hargreaves, 2011). Thus, choosing the practice theory in this study is intended to provide a comprehensive insight into analysing the actions of individuals without ignoring cultural perspectives (Shove, 2003). This study fills this gap by adopting Schatzki's practice lens approach to empirically explore the implementation of sustainability practices in Kuwaiti HE organisations.

Figure 1. Teleoeffective Topology – Performing and understanding the Practice.



Source: Adapted from Schatzki (2002).

4. Research Methods

4.1 The Methodology

Interviews were selected as the primary data collection process because they can provide in-depth data about individual perspectives to develop an all-inclusive viewpoint (Cassell and Symon, 1994). Twenty twenty-one telephone interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed, lasting between 30 to 60 mins. The respondents were mainly educators and administration staff. Interviews with educators covered topics including an understanding of sustainability, the implementation of sustainability, and any barriers experienced by the educators in complying with sustainability practices on a daily basis. Interviews with management/administrative employees included topics regarding how they perceived sustainability practices and the reasons for implementing sustainability mechanisms in the University's core values. It also explored how it was done, the barriers experienced in the implementation process, and the steps taken to surmount those issues.

4.2 Data Collection

The data collection process started with ethical approval from Aston University to undertake interviews. The aim was to conduct face-to-face interviews; however, due to the Covid-19 health crisis, it was difficult to get in touch in person. Through the gatekeeper, a general invitation for

participation in the study was sent to those who met the criteria of our study. Administrative staff included those individuals who had critical roles in implementing specific sustainability projects at an HE institution. The participants were chosen based on their willingness for an interview to share their views and knowledge on this issue. Table 1 shows the background profile of all the participants. Out of twenty-one participants, sixteen were educators, and the remaining five were from administration\management staff, having a pivotal role in the sustainability implementation process. Out of sixteen educators, nine were females, and seven were males. From the administrator position, three participants were male, and two were female. All participants had a PhD as the highest degree attained.

4.3 Data Analysis

To maintain the anonymity of participants, each participant was given a code *resp 1, resp 2... 21*. The data was initially read through to enable a systematic review of the evidence collected from interview recordings, focusing on identifying common themes. Husser (1970) argues that meaningful understandings of human motivation can never be entirely objective, so, from an ontological perspective, subjectivity in categorising responses is inevitable and not a significant impediment to the research process. Initially, screening of the transcribed and translated (from Arabic to English) data revealed several consistent arguments, and quotes capturing these as pervasively as possible were selected for inclusion in the text. The data was then coded using thematic content analysis based on the "constant comparison" methodology described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process enabled us to identify and extract the recurrent themes in the participants' accounts. Flick (2009) indicates that the process of coding responses on a thematic basis is suitable in situations where "sampling is oriented to the groups whose perspectives seem to be most instructive for analysis", and data are gathered on the basis of "defining topics and at the same time remaining open to the views related to them" (p. 318) both of which were the case here.

The in-depth, line-by-line examination of the text enabled the identification of the standard terms participants used to illustrate both concrete and abstract notions regarding sustainability. Words and phrases used frequently were identified as salient in respondents' minds, an approach Spradley (1979) refers to as "interviewing" the text. Repeated use of particular words indicated that these ideas were valuable and important in respondents' lived experiences. Here, we borrowed an approach used by (Riaz et al. 2022 and Al Mahameed et al. 2021), where unique words repeatedly used were identified, and the number of times each was used – and the number of respondents who used them. This information enabled us to formulate a theme. The chosen and most relevant quotes were tied together with thematic elements to indicate a deeper appreciation of the significance of the subject matter. The identified quotes were then written down along with a note of who said it, in which context, and where it appeared in the text, with this new documentation becoming the reference point for final analysis. The selected quotes highlighted respondents' thoughts, indicating awareness and understanding of the issues. Hence, we identified four key themes for the analysis to present the findings in a relevant manner: (i) Emotion, intention, and culture of understanding; (ii) Correct, accepted and contradicted practices; (iii) Sustainability at the practice level; and (iv) Sustainability conditions.

5. Implementing Sustainability in HE Institution in Kuwait

This section individually analyses the educators' and administrative/management perspectives using Schatzki's (2002) practice theory framework. Key perspectives and reflections about sustainability implementation in Kuwait University - College of Education were quoted and discussed in detail regarding the four principles: practical understanding, general understanding, rules, and the teleoeffective structure.

5.1. Emotion, Intention, and Culture of Understanding

Sustainability is a complex concept with several definitions "*because everybody at the university and outside is hugely enthusiastic about sustainability, but no one would give you a clear definition of what sustainability is*" (Resp 6). Indeed, at the beginning of the interviews, most participants requested a definition of what was meant by sustainability⁵. The interview focused on whether educators understand sustainability implementation as only physical activity of reducing waste, whether it is also explained to students, or if they understand that sustainability is composed of social, environmental, and economic aspects. Most of the educators' practical understanding of sustainability was restricted to the general understanding of waste reduction, such as recycling paper and electricity consumption.

"[Sustainability] was often seen as a political agenda, and people [in the University] do not have much to do with it. ...if we go back to a few years ago, we would not even talk or discuss sustainability at a senior-level meeting. It is now on the top of our meetings' agenda" (Resp 16).

Local knowledge about sustainability is essential. We must know whom we are talking to and where we are talking. ... the biggest problem we had was getting people to talk about what they think sustainability actually means to them (Resp 21).

Although this might show a lack of knowledge and awareness about the holistic definition of sustainability, which is not an uncommon phenomenon, it shows cultural and intentional concerns related to the understanding of sustainability. It further shows how sustainability can be widely implemented and appropriately applied locally. Several researchers have considered this lack of education surrounding the meaning of sustainability and the dispersion of relevant information a barrier to sustainability implementation (Bekessy et al., 2007; Reid and Petocz, 2006; Tilbury et al., 2005; Velazquez et al., 2005). The below statement illustrates one of the participants' responses regarding how they contribute to the sustainability implementation in the University:

"I contribute to the university's sustainability vision by not wasting resources such as paper and electricity; by not handing out notes instead uploading them to Blackboard, and I shut the lights and devices after I finish my lecture" (Resp 2).

On the other hand, one participant, who claimed to be aware of the concept of sustainability, mentioned a number of sustainability practices that universities can implement, such as closer

⁵ This is where we presented our understanding of sustainability and what it means for universities.

buildings to avoid using cars to reduce car CO2 emissions, garden walls to increase oxygen and promote greenery, automatic lights to reduce electricity usage and energy saving accelerators.

"The benefit of having and implementing sustainability through an early phase ... one can think of many simple things [ideas] that easily can be implanted and reduce our CO2 emissions and benefit the surrounding environment." (Resp 17).

This highlights the emotion and intention of the respondents who are enthusiastic about sustainability to change their understanding toward implementing new concepts of sustainability practices. Schatzki (2001, 2002) claimed that practical understandings alone rarely determine actions related to the practices that entail multiple actions, projects, and emotions (Schatzki labels them as 'integrative practices'). We echo Blanco-Portela et al. (2017) 's notion that behavioural attitudes towards change include a person's resistance to change to new concepts and behaviours. Dyball et al. (2015) also explained in their study that poor introduction to new sustainable concepts from top management might be the reason for the lack of participation among academic staff. Practice-arrangement bundles tend to change over time. The respective changes might result from changes in the Practice of the material arrangement (Schatzki, 2002). He denoted the emotional component encompassing the appropriate emotions. The teleoaffective structure of an accounting practice is 'efficiency', for instance, which means that the doings and sayings embedded in this Practice are aimed at efficiency. Some may argue that sustainability efficiency per se is not very emotional; we argue that it contains emotional connections towards the goal of understanding and creating a better society.

5.2 Correct, Accepted and Contradicted Practices

Regarding the participants' general understanding, most of those who did not fully grasp the practical understanding of sustainability, the majority (14 participants) showed uncertainty about how to identify the meaning of sustainability and its implementation in the HE institutions. However, they did have a positive attitude toward the benefits of sustainability and were willing to understand.

"Many groups, committees, and meetings popped up to reveal and explain how we should understand sustainability and implementation of its practices. However, unfortunately, individuals could not get it at the time, and I was not sure if these groups did" (Resp 1).

Nevertheless, when asked if they had attended the seminars about sustainable implementation and the University's vision, they stated that they did not attend. They also expressed that they did not read or educate themselves about the university sustainability implementation process. This indicates that the participants may not have made an effort to learn more about sustainability. It is possible that they had little interest in it despite expressing an willingness to understand it, or they might have been hindered by other factors such as a lack of time or resources. Nonetheless, this shows a lack of communication between the administration and educators, which might be linked to the lack of effort and enthusiasm toward the University's sustainable implementation from the educator's side. One of the participants expressed, as stated below, the lack of effort exemplified by elderly colleges due to the resistance to change because they were so comfortable with doing things the same way and following an old routine.

"Some of us (educators), especially those with old experience, do not like the new changes because they are used to traditional teaching methods that are harmful to the environment." (Resp 9).

The central features of Practice are shaped by 'doings' and 'sayings', also called activities. In the 'doings' stage, we are ultimately grounded in voluntary bodily movements in the human body. Schatzki defines 'a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure, and general understandings' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 87). Participants showed a lack of cultural understanding of change and sustainability. They also insisted that students lacked an understanding of sustainability and identified this as creating difficulty in implementing sustainability within the University. Dyball et al. (2015) suggest that to implement sustainability in higher education institutions successfully; there is a need to educate and integrate sustainability into the University's culture and educate all stakeholders, including students. This is exemplified in the below quote from one of the educators:

"Students insist on using paper and are not used to electronic methods of teaching and submission, which makes it harder for me as an educator to apply the sustainable change and educate those with no background about the subject..." (Resp 13).

Here, the 'doings' and 'sayings' are changed, disputed, and altered in reaction to situations. However, the range of doings and sayings appropriate in reaction to a specific situation is restricted by how doings and sayings are tied to a particular practice. Schatzki (2002) outlines four organising principles through which doings and sayings are tied to a particular practice. Here, this is embedded in Practice through practical understanding. Practical understanding signifies the ability of actors to react aptly to specific situations. A practical understanding contains the bodily know-how and implicit knowledge to conduct, recognise, and react to other activities. For instance, experienced accountants have a practical understanding of the ratios in balance sheets, for example, and can therefore react appropriately to anomalies in the balance sheet.

5.3 Sustainability at the Practice level

Most rules regarding Sustainability at Kuwait University are implicit rules that do not have strict consequences if not followed because the concept is new to the University and the whole country. Therefore, compliance with the sustainability vision heavily depends on one's beliefs and attitudes. Seventy-five per cent of participants agreed with this notion and espoused that they were not informed of any rules regarding sustainability.

"Rules were not introduced or explained to me, and I did not know the depth of sustainability" (Resp 8).

"There is a responsibility on us to understand these practices or seek help to understand them, but [the managers] also need to execute the project, or you can say they have a responsibility to do so" (Resp 16).

"We have been vastly adaptive ... we know it is about the broader community and what and how they do it" (Resp 20).

Since educators have control over their own time and teaching methods, no consistency was found in implementing sustainability based on the rules. In addition, fifty per cent of the respondents have expressed their negative perspective about transparent offices with mostly glass walls designed to be inclusive, provide daylight access, and therefore reduce electricity usage. As women of conservative Islamic culture, some respondents felt it was inconvenient and exploitation of their privacy. Therefore, they solve the matter by placing wallpapers on transparent walls. This could be interpreted as not following the University's sustainability implementation rules. Two of our participants espoused that:

"Putting glass walls was not desired due to breaching the privacy of faculty members and is uncomfortable" (Resp 4).

"There are some customs and traditions and personal comfort that compel doctors to not follow some sustainability concepts in the university. For instance, glass walls in the office" (Resp 19).

When we asked about Kuwait University's plan to become more sustainable, the administrative staff was proud to explain the new vision/mission of Kuwait University that shifts to a more sustainable role with staff and students surrounding environment. The mission focused on spreading awareness of sustainability among the University's stakeholders. When asked about how knowledge about the subject was spread, he responded that a special team aimed to conduct seminars and send emails about the new vision, which consisted of a more sustainable route. The participant espoused that:

"We have created a team dedicated to spreading awareness and knowledge about the sustainability concept and the University's new vision. However, seminars are not mandatory to attend, so it depends on the faculty staff and their willingness to participate in such changes" (Resp 2).

The evidence shows that there are no definite rules to the sustainability implementation regarding reducing the use of resources. Therefore, educators have been acting (reducing papers, electricity, and educating students) based on their beliefs and contentment. This creates poor goal congruence, which results in a low possibility of achieving the objective because not all staff members are on the same 'wavelength', which is supported by Ryan et al. (2010), that emphasise that the smooth, successful implementation of sustainable development in universities requires policies and rules to enforce certain behaviours. This raises the question of whether Kuwait University is taking the matter seriously and whether they are truly ready for this change. Alternatively, whether they are doing it for the right reasons; because when asked about the purpose of implementing such a change, the participant stated:

"To comply with international societies and the increase in sustainable awareness in 'New Kuwait vision' and the United Nations" (Resp 1).

According to Schatzki (2013), the different ways practice-arrangement bundles evolve have one thing in common: new practical understandings must emerge to consolidate the change. This emergence of new practical understandings takes time because the participants of a practice react differently. After all, the elements of practices are interdependent and, therefore, resilient to change because material arrangements tend to persist. Therefore, various versions of practices (within

practice-arrangement bundles) can co-exist, leading to experimentation and uncertainty on behalf of the actors who participate in Practice (Schatzki, 2013).

5.4 Sustainability Conditions

As stated above, the educators interviewed were very positive and willing to understand and implement sustainability concepts into their daily routines. However, they have also expressed negative opinions and beliefs regarding some of the sustainable initiatives in the new building structure. For instance, transparent glass walls were, in their opinion, an invasion of privacy, especially for women. In addition, student resistance was perceived as a barrier to implementing sustainability in the classroom. Fifty per cent expressed that the closer building did not motivate them to walk since Kuwait has a hot climate for most of the year. A participant stated:

"Moving [walking] between university buildings [can be difficult] as the weather is hot and impractical" (Resp 8).

Considering the local community's culture, climate, and traditions, instead of copying the western thinking of sustainability, into the implementation process is vital for a successful and aligned teleoaffective structure. Glynn et al. (1994) and Miner and Meziyas (1996) stated that sustainability is a concept that requires universities to adapt and modify their beliefs and ideas to suit their culture and surroundings. The responses from the interviewees imply that Kuwait University has implemented sustainability as a response to external international pressures instead of genuinely fearing the loss/abuse of resources for future generations. Participants suggested that if the University were serious about sustainability, they would have implemented strict rules to encourage specific sustainable actions. This was also found in studies regarding sustainability implementation in universities in Japan and Sweden, which showed that external governmental pressures were a crucial factor in the universities' shift of vision/mission (Evangelinos et al., 2009; Ferrer-Balas et al., 2008; Sammalisto and Arvidsson, 2005). A participant asserted that:

"College of Education- Kuwait University has won 3 design awards regarding environmental ecosystems (two in 2010, 1 in 2012). The main building depends on solar power installed in a specific way to take advantage of the sun in Kuwait at all times of the day. College of Education has one of the region's highest green/plant walls that recycles the AC water cooling system to water the plants. The transparent walls of the offices enhance sun exposure and light in the office to reduce electricity usage. In addition, they are designed and executed pathways to encourage health awareness" (Resp 3).

Furthermore, when asked about the influence and inspiration of such ideas/designs, the primary response was that these ideas were the top-of-the-line concepts proposed by the international design team that the University was contracted with. This might have been a significant source of the educators' discomfort regarding transparent offices and pathways in the sun, which were not as practical and suitable for the Kuwaiti culture and climate from the educator's perspective. This led to participants expressing their opinions about the design of the building and the environment:

"Committees for each college were composed to include representatives who represent the ideas, suggestions and needs of faculty, including the design of

classrooms and buildings, staff's needs, and the changes needed in the curriculum to bring sustainability knowledge. However, these committees change frequently for reasons out of my knowledge" (Resp 14).

The inconsistency in committees might have been a factor in the lack of practical communication between faculty members and the design team. This might have been a consequence of the extreme delay of the project, which was explained by the Kuwait Audit Bureau's 15 reasons discussed in section 2.3. Since top management and head offices in universities play a significant role in the success of sustainability implementation in universities, which takes a long time to develop (Sammalisto et al., 2015), the excessive delay and frequent changes in Deans and committee members throughout the 15 years that the project was in the process might have hindered the communication method between parties. Furthermore, when asked about whether Kuwait University is equipped for the new changes, a participant mentioned that:

"Yes, to an extent. But we need a cultural awareness to bring a fundamental change to the behaviours within the society, and we need to continue spreading awareness on the matter in our society" (Resp 5).

At least the administrative staff acknowledges and is aware that not all faculty members are willing to change and be more sustainable. However, this highlights that Kuwait University is still lagging in implementing the whole concept of sustainability. Because as noted by the participants' cultural changes of old habits should be applied first to achieve and meet Kuwait University's new vision/mission. The participant expressed that the vision includes:

"The vision of Kuwait university is to implement sustainability into the curriculum and major sheet courses" (Resp 11).

The attitude of administrative staff was very optimistic about the future of Sustainability at Kuwait University. However, introducing sustainability into the curriculum might be an unrealistic goal because, without the support of educators and their supporting mindsets, it will be challenging to fulfil this objective. As one of the educators pointed out, not all staff members were willing to change or learn about sustainability. This is also found at many universities where educators do not perceive sustainability as a core to their functions and therefore lack in learning about the concept (Mulder et al., 2012; Saadatian et al., 2009). Regarding the curriculum, many universities have yet to integrate sustainability fully or partially into the courses and programs (Capdevila et al., 2002; Müller-Christ et al., 2014), which is why the objective might not be appropriate for Kuwait University since they are still in the beginning stages of implementation. Generally, the 'frame' is formed essentially via practice-arrangement bundles. This also can be perceived as a setting where practices are performed, and entities and activities gain meaning. Schatzki (2002) refers to these as 'sites' of activity, where the aspects of practice-arrangement bundles create the site, and through their precise gathering, these sites offer entities and activities their distinct sense. Sites can also create a field of action simplicity in which actors can execute specific actions in a specified condition (Schatzki, 2002, 2011).

Schatzki (2002, 2016a) argues that a large phenomenon, the enactment of sustainability in our case here, can be conceptualised as networks of interconnected practice-arrangement bundles. Trends

that are considered huge in a traditional sense, from Schatzki's theoretical perspective, are conceptualised as complex relationships of practice-arrangement bundles that have a wider spatial and temporal extension (Schatzki, 2016). Schatzki (2009) argues that practice-arrangement bundles define distinctive temporal and spatial dimensions for the activities taking place within them. Schatzki (2009) explains spatiality as 'the world around an actor in its pertinence to and involvement in human activity (Schatzki, 2009, p. 36). The temporality is conceptualised as the past, present, and future of activities: the past shapes activities in that they start from a particular state of affairs; the future shapes activities as they are performed for a particular future end; the present is the moment in which the situated acting occurs and in which future and past come together in the activity. Schatzki (2011) emphasises that both temporality and spatiality are closely tied in the activities. To illustrate this connectedness, he (2011) presents the term 'time-space' in which he refers to the interconnectedness of different people's activities and opinions. Implementing sustainability practices in our case, a local conservative society, occurred within that time through rearranging understanding, social emotions, self-intentions, and patterns of culture. This envisages a society with a culture that embeds new sustainability practices.

6. Conclusion

Carbon emissions have become a global issue that has attracted public awareness, resulting in stricter policies, regulations, and higher social expectations of organisations (Adams et al., 2020). Sustainability has gained sustained momentum over the years and has been adopted as a global agenda for all green developments because of the impact of human actions on the environment (Lehman, 2002). However, implementing sustainability remains a key issue within educational institutions worldwide, which seek to integrate its core value into their facilities and operations (Avila et al., 2017). Brandli et al. (2015) noted that the institution would face internal and external challenges when a university wants to achieve a more sustainable vision. This has led to many researchers studying diverse aspects of sustainability implementation in higher education institutions. The Arab Gulf context, especially Kuwait, has been selected as a setting for the study to provide new insights into this process by examining the perspective of educators and administrators concerning sustainability implementation. The findings highlight the importance of the engagement of educators as they are perceived to have the most substantial influence on the implementation process due to being responsible for designing and delivering relevant sustainability courses. These individuals are the primary beneficiaries of newly designed facilities in new sustainable structures and buildings.

Drawing on Schatzki's (2002, 2010) practice theory framework, we focussed on the four key aspects as conceptualised by Schatzki that categorises the actions and views of an individual. These four elements (practical understanding, general understanding, rules, and teleoaffective structures) helped us to articulate the interlinks of practices and actions. Schatzki's practice organisation framing in our study draws the tacit nature of the roles played by various organisational actors in establishing goals and tasks while deploying local understanding and independence in the implementation process of sustainability practices. The study has shown a significant lack of knowledge and awareness of sustainability, especially in understanding its definition. This emphasises that educators and the administrative staff do not have similar notions about sustainability concepts and their practices. This results from educators' diverse attitudes and willingness to attend administrative staff meetings about the issue. The lack of rules and

regulations to enhance sustainability implementation was one of the key factors hindering the participation of educators in educating themselves on the matter. This also made participants act in what they see as sustainable, based on their beliefs and attitudes toward the matter. The study demonstrates that participants mainly focused on environmental issues regarding saving paper/electricity and overlooked aspects of broader concepts and core values of sustainability, suggesting that they are still at the peripheral scale or adopting the "assimilation" approach as highlighted in the study by Ivory and MacKay (2020). This is perhaps because people in Kuwait have not been thoroughly acquainted with the sustainability concept, as it has been recently introduced to not only the educational institutions but to the country as a whole and their surrounding regions. The study's findings aim to aid and provide a direction to regulatory bodies in planning future sustainable project initiatives. Educational institutions and organisations in Kuwait could find the study helpful in enacting sustainable practices and embedding values, attitudes, and behaviours for sustainable economic development in the region – envisaging a new local society with a lasting impression on its culture.

The case study shows that most participants were enthusiastic and proud about envisioning the new sustainable 2035 Kuwait vision. Their willingness to learn about the matter is seen as a good indicator. However, the lack of congruence between some participants on the concept of sustainability and its benefits shows a struggle to bring change and requires further work to fully achieve sustainable implementation in the HE Sector. The universities in Kuwait could consider creating specific guidelines and initiatives to achieve sustainability goals rather than setting or following unrealistic objectives – not achievable for the current status. Sustainability implementation occurs in a narrative that acquires repetition at the practice level, directing objective settings to the project and sub-tasks while rearranging actors' understandings of the Practice and social emotions, self-intentions, and patterns of culture. Hence, the study could help potential projects within the country to support sustainability projects whilst avoiding certain constraints that might lead to the same perspectives as mentioned by some participants. For example, establishing a sustainable culture at all levels of the organisation goes well beyond introducing sustainability initiatives such as new modules or courses or some estate greening without any change sought beyond these practices. While the changes presented in this case are positive, we call for deeper responses and a shift in organisations' culture's purposes, roles, and operations within a specific context instead of ad hoc efforts.

Engaging with the Practice theory framework offers us a theoretical basis that is fundamentally different from the theories of interaction-oriented approaches in sustainable design. Warde (2005) notes that when practices interact in different ways, 'lessons are learned, innovations borrowed, and procedures copied' (p. 141); practices mutually influence each other. As a result, change in one Practice can have far-reaching consequences for other practices with which it co-exists or is co-dependent. The present study helps us understand the emotions, intentions, and culture of a region where sustainability practices are new. However, the study enlightens us about these practices, which can be viewed as developing over time, involving several practitioners at various levels of commitment and competence. The study initiates a discourse for future work for academics and practitioners exploring the adaption and implementation of sustainability practices, not only for one particular region in a one-time space but for others to follow.

There are a few limitations of the study, which are now acknowledged: due to uncontrollable circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, semi-structured interviews conducted over the phone and video calling might have restricted the interaction and physical observations of the participants. This might have caused a lack of engagement and excitement between participants during the interview. Initially, trying to contact people through email in a country where face-to-face communication was challenging may have led to some biases in data collection. Elderly educators and those uncomfortable with online communication were inevitably exempt from the group because they did not reply to the emails. This may have led to a selection of participants who might not be seen as a fair representation of the diversity of participants. Nevertheless, the study provides good insights from those who contributed to the discussions on implementing sustainability practices in the Arab Gulf region. Future work may become a more capacious framework for interviews and exploration with a larger audience. With the call for participation in the conceptualisation of social practices stemming from the need to understand the mind, cognition, and individual intentional action, the study places a scale for further enquiry to grasp other factors that might have been overlooked in our study. Future work could further expand on interviewing auditors involved in the project by adding richness to data and analysis.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.