2021

# Exploring Eco-Friendly Strategies in Early Learning Businesses

Henry Smith
*Walden University*

# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Henry Lee Smith II

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Erica Gamble, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Elisabeth Musil, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Timothy Malone, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Exploring Eco-Friendly Strategies in Early Learning Businesses

by

Henry Lee Smith II


MBA, Western Governors University, 2013

BS, Western Governors University, 2013




Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration



Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

Some early learning business owners (ELBOs) lack implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. ELBOs that can successfully implement eco-friendly programs in their organizations can promote long-term sustainability. Grounded in Freeman's stakeholder theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify ELBOs 'implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. The participants comprised of three ELBOs from three certified eco-friendly organizations. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Five themes emerged: (a) managing stakeholders 'expectations, (b) health and wellness for sustainability, (c) business sustainability, (d) environmental sustainability, and (e) partnerships and community involvement. A key recommendation is for ELBOs to adopt eco-friendly programs unique to their environments to promote long-term sustainability. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve ELBOs resource utilization and reduce children's exposure to health hazards during the earliest, most vulnerable years of life.

Exploring Eco-Friendly Strategies in Early Learning Businesses

by

Henry Lee Smith II

MBA, Western Governors University, 2013

BS, Western Governors University, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this accomplishment to my wife, Keili, for her continued support, compassion, and commitment to being there in my pursuit of greater knowledge attainment. My younger brother, Chris, my mom, Patricia, my dad, Henry, my grandfather, Ben, and my grandmother Lula, each deserving thanks for helping shape the man I have become and being a positive example in their respective ways. I also dedicate this accomplishment to my mother-in-law, Kathryn, and my father-in-law, Kelvin, for shaping my most prominent advocate, my wife. Finally, this dedication is for those that acknowledge their contributions to my successes and can recall those instances where they made a positive impact in my life.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge Dr. Erica Gamble, the supervising Committee Chairperson, who tirelessly remained responsive to my needs and acted as my northern star guiding me successfully through this academic journey. Dr. Gamble continues to be a source of inspiration, knowledge, and encouragement in my pursuits of higher education attainment. I also acknowledge Dr. Elisabeth Musil, the second Committee Member. Dr. Musil understands the doctoral journey, and her diligence has made it possible for the free flow of information during this academic journey. I also acknowledge Dr. Timothy Malone, the University Research Reviewer. Dr. Malone's experience and feedback have added value to my study and elevated the research quality. Finally, I acknowledge my graduating cohort as we made this journey together, and their hard work has motivated me to be a better resource in support of others 'academic pursuits.

Table of Contents

# List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Many businesses have implemented green business practices to respond to increased consumer awareness and environmental concerns among stakeholders (Leonidou et al., 2017). For early learning business owners (ELBOs), the absence of green strategies can have unintended consequences that impact consumers health and business performance (Zimmer & Ha, 2017). By integrating eco-friendly business practices into their operations, ELBOs can create consumer value and improve competitiveness through sustainability (Chen & Liu, 2018).

## Background of the Problem

The research is limited on the business aspect of implementing eco-friendly practices in the early learning setting. As in other service industries, early learning businesses display linkages between company image, green practices, and consumer behaviors (Chekima et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2020; Jeong et al., 2014). The implications of those relationships on sustainability necessitate additional exploration to understand the impact those elements have on ELBOs organizations.

## Problem Statement

Eco-friendly programs for sustainability are benefiting organizations globally and can exist in every type of organization including private, public, and government (Brulhart et al., 2019; James, 2015). About 23% of the U.S. population are under 18 years of age, with more than half represented in early learning institutions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The general business problem is that many early learning organizations'

do not have eco-friendly programs. The specific business problem is that some ELBOs lack the implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. Early learning leaders from different eco-friendly certified organizations participated in a semistructured interview to share successful program implementation strategies. All participants and their organizations were in the Northeast United States. The findings may result in positive social change by improving ELBOs resource utilization and reducing children's exposure to health hazards during the earliest, most vulnerable years of life.

## Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative approach to discover ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. Qualitative research is an exploration of a social or human phenomenon. Researchers use inductive reasoning to develop the context for the data collected (Creswell, 2009). I used the qualitative method to understand how the existing literature related to ELBOs implementation strategies. In contrast, researchers use the quantitative approach to test a theory and the relationships among variables. The mixed-methods approach includes the qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which was insufficient where emerging theory and strategies were the focus.

Principal qualitative research may include case study, phenomenological, or ethnographic designs (Yin, 2018). Researchers use case studies for an in-depth investigation into dynamic environments (Ridder, 2017). Collins and Stockton (2018)

explained researchers' flexibility when using a case study design and described how

emerging themes develop from the data. Phenomenological researchers explore

participants' personal experiences from a situation (Yin, 2018), whereas ethnographic

researchers study individual and group cultural influences (Dawson, 2014). Neither the

phenomenological nor the ethnographic approach was appropriate for studying ELBOs

implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. Since the case study is a holistic

approach for theory-building and elaboration (Ridder, 2017), I chose it as the design for

this study. I considered but did not use a single-case study design, as no obvious subunits

existed, and the stakeholder theory is primarily holistic.

## Research Question

What are ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs?

## Interview Questions

1. What eco-friendly programs do you currently have in place?

2. What were the key obstacles to implementing your organization's eco-
   friendly program?

3. How did you address the key obstacles to implementing your
   organization's eco-friendly program?

4. How do you assess the strategies' effectiveness?

5. How do you ensure program standards are met?

6. What are the benefits of the eco-friendly business program; for you, the
   staff, and the children/parents?

7. What other information would you like to share regarding your organization's eco-friendly business strategies and derivative programs in early learning?

## Conceptual Framework

Stakeholder theory was the conceptual framework for this study. I used the stakeholder theory to facilitate an understanding of the findings. R. Edward Freeman (1984) initially introduced the stakeholder theory in his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. According to Freeman, stakeholders are individuals who can or are affected by an organization's business practices. Others supported Freeman's definition of stakeholders, identifying consumers, suppliers, owner-managers, and the government as all-inclusive to the meaning (Barnes & Westrenius, 2015). By analyzing the study findings through the stakeholder theoretical lens, I gained insights into ELBOs' strategies for developing and deploying eco-friendly programs.

## Operational Definitions

The operational definitions include citations for peer-reviewed articles for a comprehensive interpretation of the terms used throughout this study.

*Early Learning Business Owners (ELBOs)*: ELBOs is the terminology used to denote stakeholders such as childcare business owners and directors, parents, caregivers, or service providers (Harrist et al., 2007) responsible for managing an early learning program.

*Green Business Strategy (GBS)*: Green business strategy is the inclination to incorporate environmental concerns in business strategy (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2020).

*Green Marketing*: Green marketing integrates ecological and societal marketing concepts to communicate sustainable practices designed to identify, anticipate, or satisfy consumers and more significant societal needs (Peattie & Charter, 2016).

*Organizational Capabilities (OCA)*: The cross-functional integration of internal and external resources to maximize eco-friendly strategies (Leonidou et al., 2017).

*Sustainable Development (SD)*: Sustainable development is leveraging competitiveness through eco-friendly practices to meet current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

### Assumptions

Assumptions are issues or ideas that can be present throughout a study and accepted as accurate without further investigation (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Wilson, 2015). This study included four assumptions. The first assumption was that the qualitative method was appropriate for this study. The second assumption was that a multiple case study design would be well-aligned to explore ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. The third assumption was that the stakeholder theory was the proper conceptual framework, as the stakeholder theory incorporates all individuals with the capacity to influence the findings for this study. The final assumption was that the ELBOs would willingly participate, provide honest responses, and share any available support documentation requested for review.

**Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses or restrictions to the research process that involve factors out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study included three limitations. The first limitation was that ELBOs are primarily operating in educational institutions, and the research was from a business perspective. The second limitation was that the sampled population was restricted to the leadership represented across multiple cases. The final limitation was that there was a limited population that could participate in the study.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations denote the scope or boundaries consciously set for the study (Nelms, 2015; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study included two delimitations. The first delimitation limited the sampled population to ELBOs currently working in a certified eco-friendly organization. Including ELBOs that were not working in a certified eco-friendly organization may have changed the study results. The final delimitation limited the study to a specific geographic region. Including a broader geographic area would have required more extensive sampling beyond the scope of the research design.

## Significance of the Study

Early learning leaders are rarely studied as business leaders. Even so, Pathirana (2015) highlighted ELBOs significance in the childcare environment and the value of eco-friendly practices in early learning businesses. The findings from this study may contribute to effective business practices needed to help ELBOs achieve long-term sustainability. Furthermore, the results might contribute to positive social change by

improving ELBOs eco-friendly program efficiency in reducing negative environmental impacts on children during their most vulnerable years of life.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Researchers have often considered sustainable development (SD) in early learning organizations for its social implications. However, sustainability is a multidimensional component in the business rather than a binary variable (Fischer et al., 2020). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an example of the multifaceted approach to sustainability that extends beyond industry divides (Christ & Burritt, 2019). The need to close the distance between academia and practice through interdisciplinary processes and solutions (Christ & Burritt, 2019) is vital to ELBO's organizations from a business perspective.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the successful strategies ELBOs use to implement eco-friendly business programs. The purpose of this section is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the previously published professional and academic literature that contextualizes the business problem for meaningful inquiry. There are five primary areas relevant to understanding the premise for eco-friendly business programs for sustainability in ELBOs organizations: (a) stakeholder theory, (b) international perspectives, (c) education for sustainable development, (d) eco-friendly business practices, and (e) corporate social responsibility. These five categories are the foundational premise of the study.

I acquired the research for this study using Walden University's electronic library database as the primary search tool. My library and Google Scholar were secondary

resources. The articles related to sustainability were categorized by the search terms *eco-friendly*, *green*, or *sustainability*, which yielded over 1.5 million in the initial results. Additional searches included *preschool* or *early childhood*, which produced 5,624 results. The articles selected for review were full-text, peer-reviewed journals. I limited article analyzes to articles published after 2015, except for relevant seminal works, to validate recency in scholarly publications. The databases that I used were the following: Business Source Complete, ScienceDirect, Academic Search Complete, GreenFILE, Education Source, Directory of Open Access Journals, and Google Scholar. The search terms used as a single word or word combination were as follows: *stakeholder theory, stakeholder, theory, sustainable business, sustainable, business, corporate social responsibility, CSR, triple bottom line, sustainability, sustainable development goals,* and *SDGs*. This study included 127 total references.

**Stakeholder Theory**

Societal attitudes and expectations are constantly changing (Schaltegger et al., 2019). As such, the stakeholder theory has application in theory and practice, often reflected in the literature related to sustainability. Business scholars and practitioners must recognize stakeholders and their impact on organizational business practices. In the early learning environment, stakeholders can be more precisely defined to include childcare business owners and directors, parents, caregivers, policymakers, and social service providers (Harrist et al., 2007). These individuals impact the ways ELBOs adopt, integrate, and implement SD programs. A sound understanding of the theoretical

implications is required to interpret various stakeholders 'impact on the adoption and implementation of SD initiatives.

Stakeholder activism is an example of internal or external influences that can have theoretical implications for an organization's SD activities and environmental policies (Yang et al., 2018). Researchers have found that stakeholders 'influence extends beyond cultural context with an impact on corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in developed and developing countries (Jamali & Carroll, 2017). Therefore, the conceptual interpretation of stakeholders' influence is not limited to the geographical context distinguishable by a national economic position.

The sustainable daycare model proposed by Das et al. (2018) identified causal pathways to poor early childhood development based on the stakeholders. The primary focus of causal pathways highlighted the cycle between the socioeconomic context and the notion that stakeholders' influence is communal, cultural, and institutionally embedded in SD (Das et al., 2018). Britto et al. (2011) emphasized the focus on the quality of programs and professionals in early childhood development organizations— with equal importance given to collaboration among multiple stakeholders. ELBOs must develop the capacity to adjust for the many influential factors for sustainability and maintain collaborative relationships as the quality of programs determine the effectiveness of implementation among stakeholder groups (Britto et al., 2011).

Strategy implementation requires insight into the company's resource, capacity to integrate strategy, and stakeholder's involvement (Leonidou et al., 2016). Leonidou et al. (2017) discussed specific drivers that impact performance and the implications of an

organization's GBS. Their research included a conceptual model that demonstrated how organizational resources, OCA, and GBS related to one another. By acknowledging that organizational support comes from internal and external sources, their findings indicated that resources' availability contributed to sustainability (Leonidou et al., 2017).

Investors, regulators, and financial institutions are stakeholders that influence business strategy (Leonidou et al., 2017, p. 586). As such, each of these stakeholder groups signifies potential drivers to an organization's adoption of a GBS and eco-friendly programs. Brulhart et al. (2019) extended the discussion on how organizations can manage stakeholder's expectations and stakeholder relationships with the organization. Their research supported that OCA can positively impact performance (Brulhart et al., 2019). Whether through an internal or external lens, stakeholders have different interests and establishing cooperative relationships can shape stakeholders 'opinions and impact SD performance (Brulhart et al., 2019; Schaltegger et al., 2019).

**Contrasting Conceptual Frameworks**

There are multiple frameworks with contrasting elements when compared to the stakeholder's theory. Stakeholders 'influence can have theoretical implications that impact an organization's sustainability capacity (Leonidou et al., 2016; Schaltegger et al., 2019). Thus, the literature is abundant with various lenses researchers use to clarify the underpinnings that influence SD in businesses. Even so, there is a need to close the gap between theory and practice (Kumar, 2017), considering how different frameworks are relevant to sustainability. As such, I will provide a review of two additional theoretical frameworks most unique to this study.

From an SD perspective, institutional theory and resource-based theory are two specific conceptual frameworks closely related to stakeholder theory in this study. Figure 1 is an illustration of each theoretical framework as integrated components. Researchers have suggested that the integration of institutional theory, resource-based theory, and stakeholder theory could explain the context for SD related initiatives (Ashrafi et al., 2020). The preceding subsections include information on how the institutional theory and resource-based theory relates to the stakeholder theory and sustainability in the literature.

**Figure 1**

*Integrated Theoretical Framework Underpinning Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sustainability*
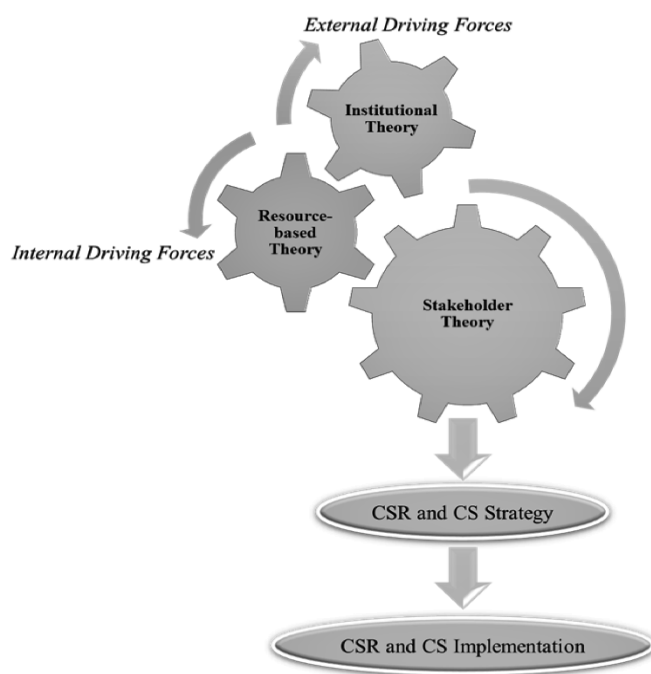


*Note.* From "Understanding the Conceptual Evolutionary Path and Theoretical Underpinnings of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sustainability" by M. Ashrafi, G. M. Magnan, M., Adams, and T. R. Walker, 2020, *Sustainability*, *12*(3), p. 760 (https://doi.org/10.3390/su12030760). Copyright 2020 by MDPI. Reprinted with permission.

*Institutional Theory*

Meyer and Rowan's (1977) introduction of the institutional theory is based upon the premise that organizational structures and decisions result from highly institutionalized environmental factors. As a result of the environmental factors—perceived societal norms—organizations conform for improved survivability (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Herold (2018) explained some of the complexities of institutional theory, including the rationale for why politics, culture, and society influence an organization's response to institutional pressures. Gordon et al. (2019) validated institutional theory in the examination of Chicago-area centers serving early learners. The institutional theory was an influencing factor as the regulatory environment exposure correlated to outside funding (Gordon et al., 2019); the implications are reflective in other studies on sustainability. Lee (2011) argued that the macro-level mechanisms of the institutional theory and stakeholder theory are intricately connected. Gordon et al.'s interpretation was for the macro-level context, which included a combination of systems and beliefs in the organization. The significance of institutional theory lies in the broader context linking field-level pressures (i.e., stakeholder influences) and firm-level agency (Herold, 2018).

*Resource Based Theory*

Barney's (1991) introduction of the resource-based theory derived from the premise that resources are heterogeneously distributed across different firms. The resources potential to promote a competitive advantage is determined by value, rareness, and substitutability (Barney, 1991). Ashrafi et al. (2020) proposed a divergent perspective of the resource-based theory that relied on integrative components of stakeholder theory

and institutional theory for SD through CSR and corporate sustainability. In the integrative model proposed in Figure 1, the resource-based approach contributed to internal drivers, while institutional theory contributed to external drivers facilitated through stakeholders 'theory. Nikolaou et al. (2018) discussed the components of resource-based theory as integrative to assist stakeholders. As such, resource-based theory continues to be relevant to understanding how stakeholders create competitive advantages through value, rare, difficult to substitute, and hard to imitate resources (Ashrafi et al., 2020; Barney, 1991; Nikolaou et al., 2018).

**Criticism of Stakeholders Theory**

Stakeholder theory has received criticism throughout the years following its earliest introduction. Goodpaster (1991) argued that distinctions in the literature focused on stakeholder analysis or stakeholder synthesis, suggesting a paradoxical framework either with or without ethics in business. Freeman's (1994) response challenged Goodpaster, among others, to consider the entire context for meaningful inquiry, rather than a narrowly defined thesis. Donaldson and Preston (1995) supported the stakeholder theory contextual perspective and identified three interrelated but divergent categories. The first was a descriptive aspect that involved observation of relationships outside the organization. The second was an instrumental element that included the strategies of stakeholders and the accomplishment of organizational goals. The third was a normative aspect that involved acknowledging the stakeholder's legitimacy and the idea stakeholders 'interests are intrinsic. Although Donaldson and Preston suggested considering the various components to contextualize the theory, critics have continued to

contest the theoretical soundness related to ethics, strategic management, and CSR activities (Freeman et al., 2020; She & Michelon, 2018; Weitzner & Deutsch, 2019).

The criticisms of stakeholder theory are not limited to conceptualization. Weitzner and Deutsch (2019) suggested that the theory struggled to meet the standard for integrating theory and practice. However, Jones et al.'s (2018) iteration of instrumental stakeholder theory encompassed the contradictory elements for sustainable competitive advantages, as Donaldson and Preston (1995) expressed. Weitzner and Deutsch recognized Jones et al.'s research for practicability. Still, they argued that the instrumental stakeholder theory approach was limited in scope, only applicable to managers with proper organizational orientation, and likely to result in inadvertent results (Weitzner & Deutsch, 2019). Others also acknowledged limitations in the stakeholder relationship capability within the emerging economies context (Jiang et al., 2019). As such, stakeholder theory criticisms—whether directly or indirectly—continued to warrant the attention of subjective academic analysis. Even so, Freeman et al. (2020) acknowledged the complexities of the theory in the modern world and asserted that critics take a critical view as competing factors exist in economic relationships (p. 219).

**Managing Stakeholders Expectations**

The theoretical and practical perspectives remain a consideration for an adequate level of insight to deduce proper reasoning for managing stakeholders 'expectations for SD. Fischer et al. (2020) discussed how sustainability becomes more complicated when managing stakeholders 'expectations. Thus, the necessity to understand how to manage expectations based on joint value creation is more effective than transactional

relationships (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2016). Joint value creation involves stakeholders '

interdependence upon one another where collaborative efforts determine the value

created, within or beyond organizational boundaries (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2016). The

concept of joint value is essential as sustainability can be analyzed through an internal

and external lens (Schaltegger et al., 2019).

Managing stakeholders require insight to assess the potential for value, and the

literature lacks depth regarding managing expectations for sustainability (Silva et al.,

2019). Silva et al.'s (2019) empirical analysis of various stakeholders involved in the

sustainability performance measurement and assessment process can help provide greater

insight into managing those expectations. Aligned with joint value creation, attention

given to stakeholders as part of the sustainability performance measurement and

assessment process can contextualize the interdependence between stakeholders (Bridoux

& Stoelhorst, 2016; Silva et al., 2019).

Stakeholders 'perceptions can be positively affected when leveraging expectations

through sustainable business practices (Wee et al., 2018). Even so, the organization

lacking a strategy for managing those perceptions and expectations will require the

proper scope and components for SD (Pinelli & Maiolini, 2017). Though it could be

argued organizational stakeholders prioritize different dimensions of sustainability

(Fischer et al., 2020), a comprehensive strategy can improve skill development for

managing stakeholders 'expectations for SD (Gove & Black, 2016).

**International Perspectives**

In April 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development published a report called *Our Common Future* to address multinational environmental issues (Burton, 1987; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The concept of sustainability originated from this report, also known as *The Bruntland Report*, and has taken on multiple meanings given different perspectives. Whether scholastically or practically, sustainability often requires clarification as it may refer to a product, process, or philosophy, all of which are permitted within the SD construct (Wall, 2018). Even so, the various aspects of SD continue to garner interest from around the world more than 30 years later.

Through the years, sustainable business practices have commonly been associated with organizations such as the International Union for Conservation, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World-Wide Fund for Nature (Iwan & Rao, 2018). These organizations and others can be found throughout the literature contributing to the intent of the Bruntland Report. Iwan and Rao (2018) discussed how the International Union for Conservation, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World-Wide Fund for Nature all contributed towards SD in education. As a result of increased interest and advocacy for sustainability, the Green School Movement, and education for sustainability (ESD) was further developed (Iwan & Rao, 2018). The term ESD has integrated economic, sociocultural, and economic context internationally (Korkmaz & Guler Yildiz, 2017) in SD. ESD will be used synonymously with education for

sustainability throughout this paper. Both terms 'contextual relevance is recognizable by their contribution to SD in ELBOs 'organizations.

Much of the literature on sustainability in educational institutions from the international perspective share similar elements. For example, researchers have studied preschool instructors from public and private institutions in Singapore to determine the effectiveness of their interactions with children on SD (Bautista et al., 2018). The findings suggested that teachers, educators, and professional providers should offer better pre-service instruction for more effective delivery (Bautista et al., 2018). Similarly, Kabadayi (2016) evaluated preschool teachers in Turkey for in-service training for sustainability. The results indicated that in-service training was essential to the teachers (Kabadayi, 2016). Although each study related to education and ESD training, they differed in context with shared objectives in the curriculum (Yazicioglu & Pektas, 2018). Ultimately, the leaders 'capacity to meet the training needs in those organizations determined the effectiveness of SD initiatives.

Throughout the literature, the SDGs are relevant in various cultural contexts for sustainability. The SDGs are reflective in 17 critical factors for sustainability, as indicated in Figure 2. SD is a consistent trend regarding training and curriculum development as a standard means for global sustainability. However, there are a few prevalent SDGs in the research involving eco-friendly business practices in early learning institutions. Those critical factors are SDGs 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, and 17. Using ESD to leverage youth knowledge attrition from the learning environment is also an aspect echoed in the text encompassing many of the SDGs.

**Figure 2**

*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*

A sustainable business model that includes SDGs in early learning is possible, as demonstrated in Das et al.'s (2018) protocol for developing a sustainable day-care in low-income communities in Bangladesh. The guidelines suggested that business leaders, policymakers, and practitioners throughout different industries would be necessary for SD (Das et al., 2018, p. 2). As with Chawla's (2015) emphasis on community involvement for sustainability, Das et al. highlighted the importance of collaborative partnerships (i.e., SDGs 9, 11, and 16) to develop a sustainable day-care model.

In many studies, there is an emphasis on partnerships for sustainability. Bull and McNeill (2019) discussed how public-private partnerships (PPPs) are growing and utilized to improve companies 'capacity to meet SDGs. As evidential in Turkish and Singaporean studies, Das et al. (2018) day-care model also contribute to SD through similar collaborative efforts. The proposed sustainable day-care model would include

solutions for poverty, quality education, economic growth, inequalities, sustainable communities, and institutions (Das et al., 2018); SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, 11, and 16, respectively. However, noticeable differences may become apparent based on local government and incentives through partnerships (Bull & McNeill, 2019, p. 484) unique to the geographic location.

Through a combination of partnerships and organizational efforts, Iwan et al. (2018) provided some characteristics of award-winning eco-friendly preschools in Bali, Berkeley, and Hong Kong. As a result of their research, three distinct themes emerged: (a) holistic, (b) building, and (c) curriculum. Some of the same topics contributed to the Green School Movement's efforts and ESD in the western hemisphere. Other studies also supported a holistic approach to ESD, where children's learning assimilate through pedagogy and the environment (Chawla, 2015). Overall, culture, local guidelines, and external credentialing bodies (e.g.., PPPs) that established green awards influenced award-winning green schools (Iwan et al., 2018).

The PPPs apply to different contexts in early learning businesses. Kocabas and Bademcioglu (2017) conducted a comparative analysis of industry-leading certifying systems for green schools. The comparative analysis included Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a certification issued by the U.S. Green Building Council. Marable (2015) conducted a study to examine programs, and the implementation strategies used in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The findings from the  Leadership in Energy and

Environmental Design certified schools corresponded with international studies such as Das et al. (2018) and MacDonald (2015) that suggested a holistic approach to ESD.

Researchers have echoed similar sentiment throughout the literature for an holistic approach in ESD, the idea may be more involved when assessing an eco-friendly school as a business. Warner and Elser (2015) argued that environmental sustainability is the single metric that can measure sustainable education conceptually. However, the integration of sustainable oriented projects and regular projects can affect how sustainable projects perform (Warner & Elser, 2015). Nevertheless, Warner and Elser provided insights from U.S. certified green schools and included SDGs, similar to MacDonald (2015) and Das et al. (2018) in the international context. Thus, the requirement for further inquiry into leadership attitudes, training, curriculum, and facilities are all necessary to the success of eco-friendly schools (Kocabas & Bademcioglu, 2017) moving into the future. Though environmental sustainability is an important measure, the ability to bridge the gap between theory and program implementation is equally significant.

**Education for Sustainable Development**

Sustainability is arguably most effectively facilitated through education with the requirement incumbent upon multiple disciplines and industries (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017). For ELBOs, ESD will require that staff members have the skills to deliver eco-friendly programs and measure program milestones. Ponguta et al. (2018) developed a conceptual model that provided insight into integrating mentorship, program alignment, and other resources for successful youth-led ESD. However, researchers have

cited that workers in ELBOs organizations lacked the skills required to facilitate high-quality ESD programs as proposed in the SDGs (Ponguta et al., 2018). ELBOs ability to establish the capacity to integrate and implement quality ESD programs is required to develop youth capable of continuing SD into the future and beyond the learning environment (Bautista et al., 2018; Warner & Elser, 2015).

There are some practical approaches to the achievement of SDGs as Taylor and Butts-Wilmsmeyer (2020) demonstrated how an ESD curriculum led program increased student's self-regulated SD promoting behaviors. Additionally, such results provide insights into one method of assessing SD in early learning organizations. Therefore, it is essential ELBOs are aware of the different ways to enhance SD within their organizations.

More research is needed for documenting SD (Bautista et al., 2018) for ELBOs skills and curriculum development. As previously mentioned, ELBOs 'in-service training for sustainability have inconsistencies regarding implementation strategies (Kabadayi, 2016). Therefore, the apparent gap in ELBOs having the requisite skills for effective ESD program implementation via curriculum require additional attention.

Researchers have continuously indicated the data is limited for ESD implementation in early learning organizations (Bautista et al., 2018; Kabadayi, 2016). Kahriman-Pamuk and Olgan (2018) addressed the concern by analyzing ELBOs with ESD programs compared to those without SD initiatives. In doing so, the findings indicated eco-friendly schools dedicated more time to ESD activities than their counterparts (Kahriman-Pamuk & Olgan, 2018). Therefore, an interdisciplinary and

globally informed approach may help conceptualize the social, economic, and environmental perspectives needed to effectively operationalize ESD in ELBOs organizations (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017, p. 77) in the absence of a universal standard.

There is evidence from Kahriman-Pamuk and Olgan (2018) and Wang et al. (2019) that indicated a standardized approach to SD in early learning businesses might evolve. Kahriman-Pamuk and Olgan assessed ESD programs in a Turkish early learning organization that shared ESD programs with those in China. Wang et al.'s ESD assessment in the Chinese early learning environment included evaluating ESD components that overlap with standard curriculums. Though Wang et al. provided insights into strategies schools can adopt (i.e., waste reduction and reusable toys), both the Turkish and Chinese context offered insights into eco-friendly programs that ELBOs without ESD can use in the adoption and implementation process.

Wang et al. (2019) also discussed the importance of ESD training for ELBOs. In addition to program development that aligns with desired ESD outcomes, addressing the limitations to effective delivery is vital (Bautista et al., 2018). Multiple studies have indicated regular training is required to improve ELBO's skills in ESD (Plevyak et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Plevyak et al. (2020) extended the discussion on training requirements and explained how some schools established environmental boards. ELBOs and staff from each grade level in the organization were on the board, and the new staff members were required to complete orientation courses in ESD (Plevyak et al., 2020). The ongoing training approach allowed ELBOs to manage the turnover process while

maintaining continuity. Moreover, the environmental board and orientation requirements helped improve ELBO's skill development for SD programs.

Although the obvious benefits of an ESD business model would be eco-friendly programs that supported wellness and the environment (Leonidou et al., 2017), the benefits continue to the competitive landscape. As more people become aware of SD benefits, there are future implications that will likely follow (Chawla, 2015). This dynamic leads to additional considerations for ELBOs and their organizations. What ways can eco-friendly programs promote sustainability now and into the future? Additionally, the competitive advantages of implementing SD programs exclusive to their business is worth considering. The following sections include information on these topics, as reflected in the literature.

**Eco-friendly Business Practices**

Eco-friendly practices can reduce long-term costs and enhance an organization's image (Jeong et al., 2014). As such, eco-conscious customers 'awareness of an organization's eco-friendly practices is likely to influence their behavior, whether favorably or unfavorably (Jeong et al., 2014). Some have argued there is a need for improvements in technology and reduced resource consumption for SD (Zralek & Burgiel, 2020). Still, eco-friendly practices for sustainability requires OCA, developing environmental competencies, and implementing ecological knowledge acquired (Dzhengiz & Niesten, 2020) to meet stakeholders 'needs and expectations.

In the early learning business setting, eco-friendly practices are multifaceted. Laasch (2018) discussed SD patterns and indicated either macro-level change or a more

restricted context is applicable. However, SD can extend beyond urban (i.e., local setting) into global environments (Han & Kim, 2018) encompassing various SDGs. Therefore, understanding the implementation of eco-friendly programs through the common frameworks may require institutional logic with context-driven stakeholders 'perspectives (Han & Kim, 2018; Laasch, 2018) unique to the serviced population. Utilizing a GBS and green marketing approach can help develop the capacity for SD. Additionally, effective use of GBS and green marketing can inform stakeholders and others of the benefits of integrating eco-friendly practices into their organizations.

*Green Business Strategy*

As stakeholders have demonstrated an ability to influence whether an organization integrates eco-friendly practices for sustainability (Warner & Elser, 2015), it is vital to understand the organizational capability for GBS. Leonidou et al. (2017) provided insights that supported OCA as a contributing factor to GBS. Findings in their study indicated that OCA resources committed to environmental protection promoted the adoption of GBS. Results also showed a positive effect on organizational resources and OCA (Leonidou et al., 2017). The information is the justification that early learning organizations can develop the capacity to integrate eco-friendly business practices by understanding how OCA supports GBS (Papadas et al., 2017).

One of the benefits of sustainability orientation (i.e., OCA for sustainability), is the ability for organizations to commit to sustainable, eco-friendly business practices (Cheng, 2020). Panwar et al. (2015) provided context to support sustainability-oriented initiative's importance to an organization while considering economic factors.

Accordingly, a decline in financial performance had a significant decrease in nonessential initiatives (Panwar et al., 2015). However, the decline in economic performance did not negatively impact core sustainability initiatives (Panwar et al., 2015). Therefore, sustainable practices as the core business functions are more adept for economic uncertainty (Panwar et al., 2015) in GBS with sustainability orientation acting as a complementary component (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2020).

Researchers have identified gaps in the literature regarding green business. Fernando et al. (2019) researched service innovation mediating significance regarding organizational performance and environmental innovation. Although Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2020) identified sustainability orientation as a contributor to GBS, ingenuity may also be a complementary component for improved performance. According to Xie et al. (2019), green product innovation can improve an organization's performance. Eco-innovation also promotes sustainability (Fernando et al., 2019). Therefore, organizations that can adopt GBS, whether through green innovation or eco-innovation initiatives, can improve performance through differentiation and value creation (Fernando et al., 2019).

Societal norms and green culture are also worthy considerations when adopting a GBS (Yang et al., 2017). Often empirical studies fail to incorporate the contextual implications (i.e., cultural effects) of green strategy implementation (Zralek & Burgiel, 2020). Even so, regardless of industry, adopting a GBS or minimizing environmental impact will not be entirely green and eco-friendly (Nair & Little, 2016). Organizations should avoid greenwashing or making unsubstantiated claims that could cause skepticism of green initiatives (Chen et al., 2020). An awareness considering the dichotomous

relationship between context, culture, and GBS can help ELBOs prioritize various dimensions and mitigate the conceptual and practical concerns for implementation (Fischer et al., 2020; Nair & Little, 2016).

The extent an organization can maximize GBS involves OCA, sustainability orientation, aspects of innovation, and cultural considerations (Brulhart et al., 2019; Nair & Little, 2016). Some would argue that GBS's effectiveness depends on knowing the "contextual factors and cultural influences" that "better predict green consumer behavior" (Nair & Little, 2016, p. 2). However so, GBS alignment with relevant SDGs will likely result in the best positioning for long-term sustainability.

### Green Marketing

Papadas et al. (2017) discussed how SD is a popular narrative throughout the literature, yet there remain limitations on empirical evidence to operationalize theory and practice for green marketing. Green marketing can be thought of as a method to satisfy customers and societal needs while being profitable and sustainable (Papadas et al., 2019; Peattie & Charter, 2016). From an ELBOs perspective, the relationship between green marketing strategies and performance must undergo a case by case analysis. Chekima et al. (2016) examined the impact of environmental knowledge, cultural values, and environmental advertising to determine the moderating effect of income level, education level, and gender on consumers 'green purchase intentions. The findings suggested cultural values and environmental advertising were the primary influences in cultivating green purchase intent among consumers (Chekima et al., 2016). As such, the results

support the notion that ELBOs should prioritize different dimensions of SD (Fischer et al., 2020) utilizing green marketing strategies.

According to Papadas et al. (2017), green marketing encompasses a three-dimensional construct: (a) strategic green marketing orientation (SGMO), (b) tactical green marketing orientation, and (c) internal green marketing orientation (IGMO). However, Ranjan and Kushwaha (2017) added the dimension of trust. Although the all-encompassing approach to green marketing indicated favorable purchase intentions (Chekima et al., 2016), the trust factor positively correlated with purchase behavior (Ranjan & Kushwaha, 2017).

Beyond the apparent significance between cultural values and green marketing dimensions, were purchase intentions among highly educated females (Chekima et al., 2016). In some contexts, researchers have substantiated green marketing activities targeted towards educated females are more effective than that of the male counterparts (Chekima et al., 2016). Therefore, early learning organizations or ELBOs can use tactical green marketing techniques to improve performance (Papadas et al., 2017). Additionally, tactical green marketing includes "all-encompassing eco-logical techniques" that articulates care for its stakeholders (i.e., caregivers, parents, students, etc.) and offer value through differentiation and SD (Choudhury et al., 2019, p. 1636; Fernando et al., 2019). Hence, the assimilation of cultural considerations in green marketing activities is vital to sustainability.

*Competitiveness through Sustainability*

Chen et al. (2015) discussed some of the global trends in green marketing. In addition to tactical green marketing positive effects on performance, IGMO enhanced the impact of SGMO on competitiveness (Papadas et al., 2019). Throughout the literature, increased awareness of sustainability needs among consumers has incentivized organizations to adopt eco-friendly practices for competitiveness (Jeong et al., 2014). ELBOs can benefit from understanding how IGMO can improve performance and competitive advantages compared to the SGMO perspective. As such, IGMO-SGMO enabled organizations can maximize profits and execute on rare, hard-to-duplicate sustainable initiatives unique to the industry (Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard, 2014; Barney, 1991).

ELBOs can benefit from learning about eco-friendly practices from other service industry entities. Walsh and Dodds (2017) discussed how hotel sustainability initiatives could differentiate service offerings for a competitive advantage. ELBOs can follow many of the same approaches to gain a competitive advantage in the early learning environment by emphasizing differentiating through eco-friendly branding (Walsh & Dodds, 2017). ELBOs effectiveness in marketing eco-friendly practices in the communities served compared to competitors may determine competitiveness. Chen and Liu (2018) investigated some of the inconsistencies in the value-capturing role of differentiation for a competitive strategy. The findings indicated a competitive approach using a differentiating strategy reduced green innovation performance (i.e., green product and process innovation). Therefore, ELBOs may have to articulate the advantages of eco-

friendly practices (i.e., superior value, differentiation, etc.) among their stakeholders and

communities to improve green innovation capacity and competitiveness (Walsh &

Dodds, 2017).

Competitive advantages achieved through eco-friendly business practices require

an awareness of the socioecological factors in the market (Tayouga & Gagné, 2016).

Some of the benefits of a green infrastructure are reflective in the following six factors

that influence adoption: (a) education, (b) provision of ecosystem services, (c) financial

incentives, (d) coordination among actors, (e) laws and policies, and (f) planning

recommendations (Tayouga & Gagné, 2016). Each of the factors presented can apply to

ELBOs that adopt eco-friendly business practices and contribute to SDGs' achievement

(i.e., SDG 4, 9, 17). Tayouga and Gagné's (2016) findings indicated education, the

provisions of ecosystem services, and financial incentives were the most influential

factors in the adoption of green infrastructure. The results aligned with Gordon et al.

(2019) assertions that early learning organizations receiving different levels of financial

incentives were more likely to be exposed to the provisions of ecosystem services (i.e.,

regulatory requirements). Thus, ELBOs seeking to develop a green infrastructure are

more likely to do so successfully by understanding regulatory requirements and

identifying financial incentives for eco-friendly programs (Gordon et al., 2019).

Whether through GBS or green marketing, the necessity for ELBOs to involve

stakeholders in the implementation of eco-friendly programs may determine the ability to

achieve the SDGs necessary to be competitive. Studies have shown that organizations

require stakeholder involvement and specific metrics to improve SD (Firoiu et al., 2019).

Leonidou et al. (2016) discussed the orientation required for SD in manufacturing firms, which can apply to the ELBOs environment. Accordingly, ELBOs with an eco-friendly orientated organization can benefit from knowing the availability of monetary incentives and green activities that external stakeholders offer to implement eco-friendly programs for competitiveness (Leonidou et al., 2017; Leonidou et al., 2016).

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

As a multidisciplinary concept, CSR has various meanings depending on the context of the discussion. Schaltegger et al. (2019) suggested that there is a requirement for more research regarding the CSR concept in business cases for sustainability (Schaltegger et al., 2019). Thus, CSR could be said to denote the extent to which the implementation of business practices involve people, planet, and profit (Deer & Zarestky, 2017). The definition is appropriate for understanding how ELBOs eco-friendly programs impact the triple bottom line or 3Ps, people, profit, and the planet.

There are ways that ELBOs can increase CSR value in their organizations. Stoian and Gilman (2017) discussed CSR for its strategic relevance and how it can impact competitiveness through a quality-driven approach. Ashrafi et al. (2020) discussion on the underpinnings of CSR and corporate sustainability held that internal and external stakeholders fueled such strategic initiatives. For example, Korkmaz and Guler Yildiz (2017) found a significant relationship between teachers (i.e., internal stakeholders) in public and private schools regarding environmental and economic values (Korkmaz & Guler Yildiz, 2017). In an Australian case study, Lasen et al. (2017) identified ESD is a cross-curricular priority among educators. As such, the internal stakeholders appeared to

be concerned with SD activities that contributed to CSR. In both examples, the researchers discovered that early learning leaders underscored the importance of eco-friendly programs among their stakeholder community.

It is also valuable to consider how program implementation contributes to CSR. McMillen et al. (2019) addressed SD implementation strategies that satisfied the intent for maximizing CSR meaning in the ESD. McMillen et al. proposed four approaches to garden education: (a) employing child-centered practices, (b) applying multicurricular techniques, (c) incorporating health education, and (d) engaging the community. Not only do the strategies meet CSR activities focus on the 3Ps (Deer & Zarestky, 2017), but are direct contributors to SDGs 4, 11, and 12, respectively. ELBOs that can understand how others in the industry implement business strategies can use CSR and eco-friendly programs for sustainability beyond their immediate stakeholder groups.

It is advantageous for ELBOs to consider how consumer's perceptions may affect CSR activities. The concept is an aspect that can also help manage stakeholders' expectations through CSR initiatives. In a study of consumer product companies with sustainable business practices, researchers found significant differences among consumer perceptions based on demographics (Jung & Ha-Brookshire, 2017). The notion suggests that ELBOs should take the initiative to differentiate the products offered, and align with the communities served to maximize CSR activities. Understanding cultural influences can help leverage eco-friendly practices to meet consumer needs (Fischer et al., 2020; Nair & Little, 2016). ELBOs can learn from consumer product manufacturers' approaches

to CSR to deliver products and services through eco-friendly programs unique to their environment.

### *Sustainability Reporting*

Sustainability reporting can support organizations in the planning, implementation, measuring, and communicating" SD progress through CSR initiatives (Rosati & Faria, 2019, p. 588). One of the methods ELBOs use to establish sustainability reporting measures is through partnerships. According to Bull and McNeill (2019), PPPs can be categorized by five relationships: (a) local implementation partnerships, (b) resource mobilization partnerships, (c) advocacy partnerships, (d) policy partnerships, or (e) operational partnerships. Each of the categories is related to an SDG and aligned explicitly with SDG 17, partnerships for the goals. For ELBOs, much of the literature for sustainability reporting relates to collaborative partnerships. Accordingly, advocacy partnerships provide support by facilitating a general awareness of shared interest for a common goal and augment organization's resources (Bull & McNeill, 2019).

An advocacy partnership that ELBOs can consider in the development of sustainability reporting is the Children Environmental Health Network (CEHN). The CEHN is a non-profit advocacy group that minimizes health risks in childcare institutions through stakeholder engagement in the communities served (Nicole, 2018). As such, CEHN provides research information and self-reporting tools to support ELBOs in "planning, implementing, measuring, and communicating" eco-friendly business practices in their organizations (Gilden et al., 2015; Rosati & Faria, 2019, p. 588). The resources

provided by CEHN as an advocacy partner can help ELBOs reach SDGs through sound CSR stewardship.

Effective sustainability reporting can help ELBOs monitor programs and develop continuity. Kealy (2019) provided insight into the effectiveness of sustainability reporting when considering CSR activities. In doing so, there were two main categories related to reporting CSR issues: (a) improve the methods and reporting of CSR outcomes, and (b) businesses need for education on all aspects of CSR (Kealy, 2019). However, decisions on the most effective implementation methods, tracking, and reporting will include multiple dimensions of sustainability (Fischer et al., 2020; Kealy, 2019). While some ELBOs may seek new ways of establishing sustainability reporting, understanding the different partnership types may help determine the best approach based on the stakeholder's demands and expectations.

As some ELBOs will benefit from an advocacy partner (i.e., CEHN) in developing sustainability reporting, others may benefit from different partnerships. Kealy's (2019) description of the different PPPs overlapped with one another, depending on the scope of the relationship and the business role. If ELBOs are working with local implementation partnerships, leveraging the partner organization's know-how is an aspect shared with advocacy and operational partnerships (Kealy, 2019). Although an organization such as CEHN can provide tools and resources, its connections with national organizations such as the Association for Early Learning Leaders and the National Association for the Education of Young Children resemble policy and operational partnerships (Kealy, 2019; Nicole, 2018). As is CEHN, the Association for Early

Learning Leaders and the National Association for the Education of Young Children are accrediting bodies that partner with ELBOs in leveraging knowledge and resources. Therefore, ELBOs can develop sustainability reporting guidelines through various stakeholder groups and networks with shared SD goals (Yang et al., 2018).

**Transition**

In Section 1, I provided the foundation of the study. In doing so, I contextualized the background of the problem and followed up with the general and specific business problems in the problem statement. Next, I continued with the purpose statement and provided information on the qualitative case study. I also provided the nature of the study with additional information on the qualitative case study method and design. Then, I provided the research question and interview questions that align with the business problem. For the conceptual framework, I provided information on Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory. Section 1 also included a description of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. To conclude Section 1, I provided information on the significance of the study and a review of professional and academic literature primarily published within the last five years of this study.

In Section 2, I will introduce the project. Then, I will provide the information on the purpose of the study, research method and design, and details regarding data collection and analysis. To conclude Section 2, I will provide information on reliability and validity in qualitative research.

In Section 3, I will present the findings of this study within the context of the conceptual framework and central research question. Then, I will also provide findings

applicable in practice and potential for social change. To conclude Section 3, I will

provide recommendations for action, future research, and my reflections.

Section 2: The Project

This section will include the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, the participant's criteria for selection, the research method and design, and a discussion on ethical research. This section will also include the data collection instrument, the data collection techniques, the data organization techniques, followed by data analysis. The section will conclude with a discussion for ensuring validity and reliability in the study.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. Early learning leaders from different eco-friendly certified organizations participated in a semistructured interview to share successful program implementation strategies. All participants and their organizations were in the Northeast United States. The findings may result in positive social change by improving ELBOs resource utilization and reducing children's exposure to health hazards during the earliest, most vulnerable years of life.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher should be well-versed in their research interest area and aware of the ongoing interaction between the problem studied and the data collected (Yin, 2018). Five attributes can signify the requisite skillset required of case study researchers: (a) the ability to ask quality questions and interpret information received, (b) the ability to listen without being distracted by personal views, (c) the ability to be flexible so unexpected situations can enhance exploration, (d) knowledgeable of the research topic studied, and (e) the ability to professionally and ethically make inquire while remaining aware of

conflicting data (Yin, 2018). As the primary researcher for this study, I used the attributes listed in exploring ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs.

My personal and professional experience has coincided with ELBOs and the early learning industry since 2008. I have consulted at the Family Child Care level, where my spouse was an ELBO. Additionally, I have consultation and volunteer experience supporting early learning institutions while working in the government sector. I also conducted my Master of Business Administration capstone project in an early learning center to improve the training, marketing, and funding allocations of various programs. My experience includes several businesses since completing my capstone, and I have maintained a research interest in operationalizing effective business practices in the early learning sector.

Researchers are responsible for conducting ethical and unbiased research. In 1979, the *Belmont Report* was published outlining ethical principles and guidelines, which included three basic tenets that researchers should use when conducting studies of human subjects: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I used the *Belmont Report* guidelines to mitigate bias and avoid viewing the data from a personal perspective. Additionally, I utilized an interview protocol (Appendix B) to standardize the interactions for interviewing and assessing the data collected during the study.

## Participants

The participants for this study included three ELBOs from three certified eco-friendly organizations. Each participant was currently working in the organization that

received and maintained an eco-friendly accreditation for at least 12 months preceding the study. Additionally, each participant has served at least 12 months in an organization with an eco-friendly certification or a comparable certification that recognizes eco-friendly business practices in the early learning environment.

I contacted the certifying agencies to share a brief introduction to my research topic. Efforts to reach the accrediting agencies were an added measure to identify organizations that readily met the criteria. I also contacted certified eco-friendly organizations directly via phone or email to provide an Invitation to Participate Letter (Appendix A) and ask about their interest in sharing their experience. As suggested by Levitt et al. (2017), selecting participants using such a criterion ensured fidelity and utility were coherent with the study's scope.

## Research Method and Design

### Research Method

The qualitative approach was the appropriate method of inquiry for this study. Researchers use the qualitative approach to assess an organizations 'environmental attributes to discover the *how* and *why* of implementation strategies (Downey & Ireland, 1979; Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Compared to the quantitative method, some have argued that qualitative research with inductive reasoning is ambiguous and casts confusion (Blaikie, 2018). Nevertheless, this study design allows analytic generalization with specific data collection methods, analysis, and assumptions to avoid ambiguity (Blaikie, 2018; Yin, 2018, p. 40). The quantitative approach (i.e., deductive logic) is

derived from theory to investigate hypotheses and the significance between variables (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, it was not suitable for the scope of this study.

**Research Design**

The multiple case study was the most appropriate design for this study. Researchers use case studies to develop "action-oriented" solutions for an organization (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 66). The case study is comparable to the phenomenological and ethnographic designs for use in qualitative research. Researchers use the phenomenological approach to understand participants' living experiences, and the ethnographic design to understand participants' cultural patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2019). Lasen et al. (2017) demonstrated how a case study results in action-oriented activities from thematic concepts that provide an organization's solutions. Although phenomenological and ethnographic research designs are qualitative constructs, both were insufficient for understanding dynamic contexts where researchers determine the *how* and *why* of occurrences (Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). As suggested by Guest et al. (2020), data saturation through semistructured interviews occurred once there was no new information addressing the research question.

<div align="center">

**Population and Sampling**

</div>

Qualitative researchers must deliberately select participants with the knowledge and skills to provide rich data for in-depth analysis (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The nonprobability, purposeful sampling method helps identify participants with the required abilities and expertise to inform qualitative research (Guetterman, 2020; Ridder, 2017). For this study, the purposeful sampling method was appropriate for identifying those

ELBOs with requisite skills and expertise. The population sampling and selection process should continue until the interviews yield no new analytical information for data saturation (Guest et al., 2020; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). After three interviews, I was able to reach data saturation.

## Ethical Research

Researchers should maintain the highest standards for ethical research (Yin, 2018). In preparation for this study, the participants received the Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) and the informed consent form for participation. The informed consent form included the study's purpose, general expectations during and after the study, confidentiality clause, and information on withdrawal procedures from the research. Each of the associated disclosures were to meet the intent of the *Belmont Report* ethical standards and guidelines. Thus, I observed the basic ethical principles in the following ways: (a) participants were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty, (b) participants were protected from unnecessary risk or distress, (c) participants identity and information remained confidential, (d) participants received equitable compensation for participation, and (d) I securely stored the collected data and will destroy it after 5 years. The inclusion of moral code supports the ethical standards and evaluations of human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Accordingly, the Institutional Review Board requires ethical research standards review and approval before participant recruitment and data collection (Walden University Research Ethics, 2020). Therefore, actions to obtain permission to conduct the study

followed the process set by the Institutional Review Board and the approval number for this study was 09-01-20-0602461.

## Data Collection Instruments

As a researcher, I was the primary data collector for this study. The data collection process included semistructured interviews that followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix B). An interview protocol contains the semistructured interview questions format that allows participants to share rich, descriptive experiential data (Bearman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Roberts et al., 2019). Additionally, this study included participant validation and codebook. Participant validations and a codebook enhance contextual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007; Yin, 2018). Although qualitative case studies have inherent limitations, I used data triangulation for added rigor. Researchers use the triangulation of multiple data sources to corroborate findings to ensure validity and credibility (Roberts et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007; Yin, 2018).

## Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique included semistructured interviews using an innovative videoconferencing platform called Zoom. A few advantages of using videoconferencing software for qualitative research is a reduction in travel expenses and data transcription costs (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Irani, 2019). Participants also benefit from the ability to interview in a relaxed, non-threatening environment (Archibald et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2019; Irani, 2019). Some disadvantages can include the potential breach of privacy when participants can record or access stored recordings (Tuttas, 2015).

Other concerns may consist of connection issues or the researcher's limitations to fully assess the environment for contextual data (Archibald et al., 2019; Irani, 2019).

Interview protocols can help manage the interview process for reliability (Bearman, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007). As such, I developed an Interview Protocol (Appendix B) to minimize such concerns during the data collection process. Additionally, measures taken through research design, such as the data triangulation method for contextual analyzes and participants' validation for interpretation of the descriptive text, can mitigate the need for onsite observations (Denzin, 2017; Roberts et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Therefore, I included the data triangulation method and participants' validation as essential components in my research. The Zoom software allows users to invite attendees selectively and disable recording options (Zoom, 2020). Thus, it was a formidable data collection medium for this study. The notes, transcriptions, emails, and associated data collected will remain stored in a localized, fireproof vault for 5 years, after which I will destroy all items.

## Data Organization Technique

This study included a combination of data organization techniques in the Data Management Plan (Appendix C). A data management plan provides information on how the data is "collected, organized, managed, stored, and backed up" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 280). I collected the data using semistructured interview questions and Zoom videoconferencing software. The information recorded on the videoconferencing platform was password protected and encrypted, only accessible by me until deleted. Using digital analysis software can optimize data processing rigor and improve complex

data analysis efficiency (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020; Maher et al., 2018; Robins & Eisen, 2017). Thus, NVivo, a digital analysis software package, was also included to organize and categorize the data interaction for analysis.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study began with organizing the information collected from the interviews, documents gathered, and literature review. In doing so, I transferred the audio transcripts from the meetings from the Zoom platform to NVivo. I also uploaded the archival documents into NVivo. All imported data in NVivo were coded based on the codebook (Appendix D) to identify themes related to the literature and conceptual framework. Using a codebook and NVivo can contribute to reliability (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Robins & Eisen, 2017). Both also contribute to bias mitigation and the triangulation of data for depth of analysis across multiple sources (Denzin, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Yin, 2018), including updates to the literature. After preliminary data analysis, each participant validated material inferences summarized from the descriptive text. Thus, the codebook, NVivo, and the triangulation method were appropriate for data analysis.

## Reliability and Validity

### Reliability

This study included a codebook (Appendix D) to complement data analysis using NVivo and the triangulation method from a realist perspective. The combination of those components enhanced the overall reliability of the data, minimizing errors and bias. Future researchers can follow the guidelines (i.e., coding, data management, etc.) and

replicate procedures in future case studies (Roberts et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007; Yin, 2018). As outlined, the participant's validation, transcripts review, and analysis procedures promote dependability. The tracked changes (i.e., recoding, emerging concepts, etc.) during the study add a level of rigor for interpretation of the findings (Saunders et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007).

**Validity**

Validity through predictable coding and analysis can help solidify a study's reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, an emphasis on comprehensive data collection methods (i.e., semistructured interviews) and data analysis (i.e., triangulation) contributed to research validation. Internal validity is relative to *credibility* and external validity comparable to *transferability* (Saunders et al., 2019; Schwandt et al., 2007). The credibility aspects included participant's validation, a process to confirm the participant's meaning and intent to ensure the correct interpretation of shared data (Saunders et al., 2019). Through research and design, the transferability aspects were generalized so scholars and practitioners can use in their respective settings. By incorporating the different credibility and transferability components, objectivity promotes confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007). Additionally, continuous interviews until redundancy in data across multiple cases satisfied the data saturation criteria and contributed to the study's overall reliability and validity.

**Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided the purpose of the study. The section also included the research method and design, and the details regarding data collection and analysis. I concluded Section 2 with information on reliability and validity in qualitative research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

**Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. Early learning leaders from three separate eco-friendly certified organizations participated in a semistructured interview to share successful eco-friendly program implementation strategies. There were two predominant themes identified from coding analyzes, two lesser themes, and an emerging theme that was unanticipated during the codebook development ahead of the data collection phase. In the following sections, I will present the findings, discuss the applications to professional practice, the implications for social change, and my recommendations for further research. I will end the entire section with personal reflections and a conclusion.

**Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: What are ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs? In this section, I will provide thematic analyzes and discuss the findings concerning the themes. Table 1 is an illustration of the occurrences of themes throughout the study. The five themes identified from the research include: (a) managing stakeholders 'expectations, (b) health and wellness for sustainability, (c) business sustainability, (d) environmental sustainability, and (e) partnerships and community involvement.

Table 1

*Occurrences of Themes*

| Themes | N |
| --- | --- |
| Managing stakeholders' expectations | 124 |
| Health and wellness for sustainability | 100 |
| Business sustainability | 63 |
| Environmental sustainability | 45 |
| Partnerships and community involvement* | 35 |

*Note.* $N$ = Total occurrences of themes across all cases.
*Emerging theme added to codebook during data analysis.

## Theme 1: Managing Stakeholders' Expectations

The most cited theme among all cases was managing stakeholders 'expectations. This category developed from any evidence that indicated a participant's perspective or efforts resulted from stakeholders 'influence, perception, or pressure. Responsiveness to stakeholders 'expectations contributes to sustainable businesses (Fischer et al., 2020). In each case, ELBOs shared a similar sentiment regarding their responsiveness to their customers 'expectations. Participant 3 (P3) identified an eco-friendly strategy that restricted the use of harmful sprays for outside play areas. During the interview, P3 stated, "we don't use any sprays around the children because that's very crucial. My parents are on top of that. We never spray anything dangerous around the playgrounds…it's not good for the children."

Evidence from the literature supports such eco-friendly strategies that reflect ELBOs and parents' collaborative efforts to protect children. In the case of ELBOs, eco-friendly programs' success relies on complex stakeholder relations that include owners,

managers, and suppliers (Barnes & Westrenius, 2015). Participant 2 (P2) provided insights into how they solicit information from the children and their parents to actively manage stakeholders' expectations. During the interview, P2 stated, "we assess our kids every six months. And I also send home a survey to my parents every six months...that gives them the opportunity to say what they're not probably going to say to you right when it happens."

Thematically, managing stakeholders 'expectations is closely related to the stakeholder theory, which may have contributed to its prevalence in the research. Even indirectly, ELBOs emphasized how their strategies helped them manage expectations. P2's statement demonstrated how assessments and surveys provide an opportunity for stakeholders' (i.e., children and parents) feedback. It appeared that the participants were concern about stakeholders 'expectations regardless of whether it was directly reflective in existing business practices. Although managing stakeholders 'expectations as a theme was the most cited category, it was the second most represented when coded against program standards.

**Theme 2: Health and Wellness for Sustainability**

The second most cited theme across all cases was health and wellness for sustainability. This category developed from any evidence that indicated a participant's perspective or efforts resulted from health and wellness for sustainability. In an eco-friendly context, it is common to continuously manage organizational resources with changes (Leonidou et al., 2017). In each case, ELBOs demonstrated a similar technique when referring to the COVID-19 impact on their eco-friendly business practices.

Participant 1 (P1) identified changes to the use of their products for cleaning. During the interview, P1 stated, "we use all eco-friendly supplies while kids are here. And once they leave for the day, we bleach down the bathrooms and we clean…"

As the conceptual framework for this study, the stakeholder theory further contextualizes how stakeholders can influence core business practices. In the case of P1, changing the methods for sanitization contributed to health and wellness for sustainability. P2 also provided insights into how their organization modified existing health and wellness strategies to comply with their local COVID guidelines. During the interview, P2 stated, "we have to clean the toys a little bit more regularly per our licensing regulations with the COVID, but I'm pretty much doing that anyway."

It did not appear COVID was the primary reason for focusing on health and wellness for sustainability. P2's statement also included managing stakeholders' expectations alongside the inherent standards they have set for themselves through existing programs. In reviewing the participants' shared requirements for eco-friendly certification, the emphasis on health and wellness may have had the most significant influence on existing business practices. More so than any other categorical theme, health and wellness for sustainability was the most evenly distributed category across all cases. Although health and wellness for sustainability was the second most cited category, it had the most significant representation when coded against program standards.

**Theme 3: Business Sustainability**

The third most cited theme across all cases was business sustainability. This category developed from any evidence that indicated a participant's perspective or efforts

resulted from the business performance or competitiveness. Differentiation may reduce

green innovation performance when taking a competitive approach, but superior value for

consumers can promote sustainability (Chen & Liu, 2018; Walsh & Dodds, 2017). In

each case, ELBOs identified strategies that emphasized value creation for their

customers. In response to a question on the impact of COVID on business operations, P3

provided insights into how competitiveness was a byproduct of an eco-friendly

organization. During the interview, P3 stated, "did not affect my program at all except for

a positive impact…my children's parents felt safe enough to bring all their children back

to me. Plus, I still have a waiting list."

As indicated in Figure 1, ELBOs eco-friendly practices (i.e., internal drivers)

were adequately aligned to offer value to their stakeholders when COVID (i.e.,

institutional pressures) adversely impacted the industry. ELBOs ability to leverage

operations with minimal change to their programs created a competitive advantage.

During the interview, P1 stated, "when everyone went home, I then opened up as a central

personnel site. I ended up with a full house anyway picking up brothers and sisters, older

brothers and sisters to help."

Although business sustainability was the third most cited category, the emphasis

on value and stakeholders contributed to ELBOs performance and competitiveness. The

eco-friendly programs were significant, but service availability and the trust among

immediate stakeholder groups seemed to contribute to sustainability. Business

sustainability was the least represented theme when coded against program standards to a

lesser value than any other category, apart from partnerships and community involvement.

**Theme 4: Environmental Sustainability**

The fourth most cited theme across all cases was environmental sustainability. This category developed from any evidence that indicated a participant's perspective or efforts resulted from their impact on the environment or the earth. Evidence from the study substantiated Kahriman-Pamuk and Olgan's (2018) findings that eco-friendly schools share similar program strategies. In each case, ELBOs described a process to protect the environment and the earth well into the future through ESD. During the interview, P1 stated, "we organize garbage pickups for the school for the kids…part of a moral compass of knowing that you're creating the greater good and helping to create little independent, strong thinkers about the environment for the future."

As P1 referred to activities that will hopefully promote environmental stewardship into the future, P2 shared a similar sentiment regarding a video the children watched about pollution. P2 shared strategies that validated Bautista et al.'s (2018) research on how effective ESD delivery can shape learning outcomes. During the interview, P3 stated, "we watched the video. And by the end, they were like, they can't do that anymore. You got to tell them fishermen…they're hurting sea turtles…they realized some of their actions can really hurt others."

There was little evidence to suggest that there were formal procedures, but the activities and strategies implemented promoted environmental centric outcomes. In this study, it appeared ELBOs idea of creating a sustainable future impacted the immediate

stakeholder groups. Although environmental sustainability was the fourth most cited category, it was the third most represented theme when coded against program standards.

**Theme 5: Partnerships and Community Involvement**

The fifth most cited theme across all cases was partnerships and community involvement. This category developed from any evidence that indicated a participant's perspective or efforts resulted from partnerships and community involvement. Evidence from the study supported Bull and McNeill's (2019) discussion on the benefits of PPPs for ELBOs organizations. In each case, ELBOs demonstrated some commitment to partnerships and community involvement, even if among the immediate stakeholder groups (i.e., children, parents, etc.). During the interview, P2 stated, "every two months we choose an organization and they're mostly local, locally based to do some type of humanitarian efforts…we just were informed that an alumni family of ours had a house fire…we will be collecting gift cards and donating."

Suggestive from the statements made by P2, partnerships are not limited to the benefit of ELBOs, but extends to the communities served. However, P3 provided an example of how their program benefited from a PPP in their implementation of eco-friendly programs. During the interview, P3 stated, "the Resource Center came in…we were trying to get accredited and nationally accredited and credentialed…she came in and gave us a lot of great information one let's get rid of the carpet."

The benefits P3 experienced from their partnership contributed to the standard of the organization's eco-friendly programs. These relationships were minimal but reoccurring throughout the research. Apart from business sustainability, partnerships and

community involvement was the least represented theme when coded against program standards.

## Applications to Professional Practice

In this study, ELBOs eco-friendly business strategies contributed to sustainability, even while experiencing an economic downturn. Other early learning leaders can benefit from recognizing sustainable value as a combination of interactions between economic, social, and environmental value forms (Evans et al., 2017). The findings substantiated the complexities of an organization's response to institutional pressures (e.g., pandemic), and the advantages of value creation for stakeholders (Herold, 2018). The implementation strategies shared throughout the study have immediate application for ELBOs that desire to implement eco-friendly programs for sustainability.

Five themes categorized ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs: (a) managing stakeholders 'expectations, (b) health and wellness for sustainability, (c) business sustainability, (d) environmental sustainability, and (e) partnerships and community involvement. The insights shared from the participants, the literature review, and the conceptual framework (e.g., Figure 1) can assist early learning leaders in developing eco-friendly programs in their organizations. Though the findings suggested that the immediate stakeholder groups benefited the most from ELBOs SD initiatives, sustainability is not restricted to creating value for a single stakeholder group (Evans et al., 2017). It is necessary to note that partnerships and community involvement emerged as a common theme. ELBOs that can reconcile these five themes for application in their unique environments have the best chance for long-term sustainability.

**Implications for Social Change**

Implementing successful eco-friendly programs can result in positive social change by improving ELBOs resource utilization and reducing children's exposure to health hazards during the earliest, most vulnerable years of life. In this study, ELBOs demonstrated how recycling and waste reduction were fundamental parts of their program. Other eco-friendly practices included practices that restricted the use of harmful products around children and their play areas. In an environment where health consciousness has a global lens of increased sensitivity, ELBOs have an opportunity to influence such positive social change in children, their families, and communities for years to come.

**Recommendations for Action**

This study and its findings may be most beneficial to early learning leaders and their immediate stakeholders (i.e., children, parents, and communities). As a researcher of eco-friendly programs in the learning environment from a business perspective, sharing the findings with the participants and their advocates is valuable. Furthermore, publishing this information for open access will benefit the greater academic and professional community. Those interested in eco-friendly programs for sustainability will have the opportunity to build upon this research, whether from a business or educational perspective. Interest in this topic should expand as scholars and practitioners across other disciplines become aware, as it has imminent meaning for their families and communities.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore ELBOs implementation strategies for eco-friendly programs. There were three limitations in this study that could inform future research. The first limitation was the ELBOs were primarily operating in educational institutions, and the research was from a business perspective. Future research that considers the educational variances in outcomes through a business lens may improve program effectiveness. The second limitation was the sampled population was restricted to the leadership represented across multiple cases. Future research that considers teachers' and parents' perspectives may provide insights outside this research's scope. The final limitation was that there was a limited population that could participate in the study. Future research that considers the national landscape may provide more significant insights reflective of the regional influences.

**Reflections**

There is a sense of excitement when I consider the study of eco-friendly programs. Much of my reflections involve discussions with the participants and their passion for what they do. In developing various parts of this research, I made careful decisions on which topics to include. It was essential to cover specific categories from the literature that could inform the analysis post-interview. The study developed organically at every stage beyond these controls. There were no apparent biases when approaching this subject. I chose to focus on eco-friendly programs rather than highly inferential matters to mitigate any unknown biases. It was rewarding to see how my choices on the

various topics and literature were reflective of the participants' experiences and research results.

## Conclusion

ELBOs are business leaders with a responsibility to their organization and the generations of tomorrow. The evidence from this study provides practical knowledge to the early learning field from a business perspective. ELBOs that can successfully implement eco-friendly programs will impact how early learning leaders of the future are studied. The five themes of this study (a) managing stakeholders 'expectations, (b) health and wellness for sustainability, (c) business sustainability, (d) environmental sustainability, and (e) partnerships and community involvement are cornerstones for long-term sustainability. Many early learning institutions will remain without eco-friendly strategies. However, this study provides a starting point to a global-informed approach to implementing eco-friendly programs for sustainability.

References

Annan-Diab, F., & Molinari, C. (2017). Interdisciplinarity: Practical approach to

advancing education for sustainability and for the Sustainable Development

Goals. *International Journal of Management Education*, *15*, 73-83.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2017.03.006

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using

Zoom Videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and

experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative*

*Methods*, *18*, N.PAG. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Arseculeratne, D., & Yazdanifard, R. (2014). How green marketing can create a

sustainable competitive advantage for a business. *International Business*

*Research*, *7*, 130-137. https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v7n1p130

Ashrafi, M., Magnan, G. M., Adams, M., & Walker, T. R. (2020). Understanding the

conceptual evolutionary path and theoretical underpinnings of corporate social

responsibility and corporate sustainability. *Sustainability*, *12*(3), 760.

https://doi.org/10.3390/su12030760

Barnes, L., & Westrenius, A. (2015). Managing complex business relationships: Small

business and stakeholder salience. *Journal of Developing Areas*, *49*, 481-488.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2015.0104

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of*

*Management*, *17*, 99. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108

Bautista, A., Moreno-Núñez, A., Ng, S., & Bull, R. (2018). Preschool educators'

interactions with children about sustainable development: Planned and incidental

conversations. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *50*, 15-32.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-018-0213-0

Bearman, M. (2019). Focus on methodology: Eliciting rich data: A practical approach to

writing semi-structured interview schedules. *Focus on Health Professional*

*Education*, *20*(3), 1-11. https://fohpe.org/FoHPE

Bergeron, D. A., & Gaboury, I. (2020). Challenges related to the analytical process in

realist evaluation and latest developments on the use of NVivo from a realist

perspective. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 23*, 355-365.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2019.1697167

Bıçakcıoğlu, N., Theoharakis, V., & Tanyeri, M. (2020). Green business strategy and

export performance: An examination of boundary conditions from an emerging

economy. *International Marketing Review*, *37*, 56-75.

https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-11-2018-0317

Blaikie, N. (2018). Confounding issues related to determining sample size in qualitative

research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *21*, 635-641.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1454644

Bridoux, F., & Stoelhorst, J. W. (2016). Stakeholder relationships and social welfare: A

behavioral theory of contributions to joint value creation. *Academy of*

*Management Review*, *41*, 229-251. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2013.0475

Britto, P. R., Yoshikawa, H., & Boller, K. (2011). Quality of early childhood

development programs in global contexts: Rationale for investment, conceptual

framework and implications for equity. *Social Policy Report*, *25*, 3-23.

https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2379-3988.2011.tb00067.x

Brulhart, F., Gherra, S., & Quelin, B. V. (2019). Do stakeholder orientation and

environmental proactivity impact firm profitability? *Journal of Business

Ethics*, *158*, 25-46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3732-y

Bull, B., & McNeill, D. (2019). From market multilateralism to governance by goal

setting: SDGs and the changing role of partnerships in a new global

order. *Business and Politics*, *21*, 464-486. https://doi.org/10.1017/bap.2019.9

Burton, I. (1987). Report on reports: Our common future: The World Commission on

Environment and Development. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable

Development, 29*, 25-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.1987.9928891

Chawla, L. (2015). Benefits of nature contact for children. *Journal of Planning

Literature, 30*, 433-452. https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412215595441

Chekima, B., Chekima, S., Syed Khalid Wafa, S. A. W., Igau, O., & Sondoh, S. L.

(2016). Sustainable consumption: The effects of knowledge, cultural values,

environmental advertising, and demographics. *International Journal of

Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, *23*, 210-220.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2015.1114043

Chen, J., & Liu, L. (2018). Profiting from green innovation: The moderating effect of

competitive strategy. *Sustainability*, *1*, 15. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010015

Chen, Y.-S., Huang, A.-F., Wang, T.-Y., & Chen, Y.-R. (2020). Greenwash and green

purchase behaviour: The mediation of green brand image and green brand

loyalty. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *31*, 194-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2018.1426450

Chen, Y.-S., Lin, C.-Y., & Weng, C.-S. (2015). The influence of environmental friendliness on green trust: The mediation effects of green satisfaction and green perceived quality. *Sustainability*, *7*, 10135-10152. https://doi.org/10.3390/su70810135

Cheng, C. C. J. (2020). Sustainability orientation, green supplier involvement, and green innovation performance: Evidence from diversifying green entrants. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *161*, 393-414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3946-7

Choudhury, D., Rao, V. G., & Mishra, M. K. (2019). Impact of strategic and tactical green marketing orientation on SMEs performance. *Theoretical Economics Letters*, *9*, 1633-1650. https://doi.org/10.4236/tel.2019.95104

Christ, K. L., & Burritt, R. L. (2019). Implementation of sustainable development goals: The role for business academics. *Australian Journal of Management*, *44*, 571-593. https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896219870575

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2019). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Das, M., Elsey, H., Shawon, R. A., Hicks, J., Ferdoush, J., Huque, R., Nasreen, S., Wallace, H., & Mashreky, S. R. (2018). Protocol to develop sustainable daycare for children aged 1-4 years in disadvantaged urban communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *BMJ Open, 8*(7), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024101

Dawson, P. (2014). Temporal practices: Time and ethnographic research in changing organizations. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 3,* 130-151. https://doi.org/10.1108/joe-05-2012-0025

Deer, S., & Zarestky, J. (2017). Balancing profit and people: Corporate social responsibility in business education. *Journal of Management Education, 41*, 727-749. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562917719918

Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Routledge.

Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review, 20*, 65-91. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1995.9503271992

Downey, H. K., & Ireland, R. D. (1979). Quantitative versus qualitative: Environmental assessment in organizational studies. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*, 630-637. https://doi.org/10.2307/2392368

Dzhengiz, T., & Niesten, E. (2020). Competences for environmental sustainability: A systematic review on the impact of absorptive capacity and capabilities. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *162*, 881-906. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04360-z

Evans, S., Vladimirova, D., Holgado, M., Van Fossen, K., Yang, M., Silva, E. A., & Barlow, C. Y. (2017). Business model innovation for sustainability: Towards a unified perspective for creation of sustainable business models. *Business Strategy and the Environment, 26*(5), 597-608. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1939

Fernando, Y., Chiappetta Jabbour, C. J., & Wah, W.-X. (2019). Pursuing green growth in technology firms through the connections between environmental innovation and sustainable business performance: Does service capability matter? *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, *141*, 8-20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2018.09.031

Firoiu, D., Ionescu, G. H., Băndoi, A., Florea, N. M., & Jianu, E. (2019). Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Romania. *Sustainability*, *11*, 2156. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11072156

Fischer, D., Brettel, M., & Mauer, R. (2020). The three dimensions of sustainability: A delicate balancing act for entrepreneurs made more complex by stakeholder expectations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *163*, 87-106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4012-1

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Prentice-Hall.

Freeman, R. E. (1994). The politics of stakeholder theory: Some future directions. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 4*, 409-421. https://doi.org/10.2307/3857340

Freeman, R. E., Phillips, R., & Sisodia, R. (2020). Tensions in stakeholder theory. *Business & Society*, *59*, 213-231.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650318773750

Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Social Change*, *10*, 19-32. https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02

Gilden, R., McElroy, K., Friedmann, E., Witherspoon, N. O., & Paul, H. (2015). Evaluation of the children's environmental health network's environmental stewardship checklist responses. *Journal of Environmental Health, 77*(7), 22-28. http://www.neha.org/publications/journal-environmental-health

Goodpaster, K. E. (1991). Business ethics and stakeholder analysis. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *1*(1), 53-73. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/business-ethics-quarterly

Gordon, R. A., Stout Sosinsky, L., & Colaner, A. (2019). Directors 'reports about program-wide pedagogical approaches: Using institutional theory in a mixed methods study of Chicago-area centers serving 3- and 4-year old children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *49*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.05.003

Gove, A., & Black, M. M. (2016). Measurement of early childhood development and learning under the sustainable development goals. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *17*, 599-605. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2016.1243520

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, *15*, 1-17.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076

Guetterman, T. C. (2020). *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Research*

*Sampling Strategies*. Oxford University.

https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199756810-0241

Hamilton, A. B., & Finley, E. P. (2019). Qualitative methods in implementation research:

An introduction. *Psychiatry Research*, *280*.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.112516

Han, M. J. N., & Kim, M. J. (2018). A critical review of child-friendly environments,

focusing on children's experiential perspectives on the physical world for

sustainability. *Sustainability, 10*, 3725. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103725

Harrist, A. W., Thompson, S. D., & Norris, D. J. (2007). Defining quality child care:

Multiple stakeholder perspectives. *Early Education and Development*, *18*, 305-

336. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280701283106

Herold, D. M. (2018). Demystifying the link between institutional theory and stakeholder

theory in sustainability reporting. *Economics, Management and*

*Sustainability*, *3,* 6-19. https://doi.org/10.14254/jems.2018.3-2.1

Irani, E. (2019). The use of videoconferencing for qualitative interviewing:

Opportunities, challenges, and considerations. *Clinical Nursing Research*, *28*, 3-8.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1054773818803170

Iwan, A., & Rao, N. (2018). The green school concept: Perspectives of stakeholders from

award-winning green preschools in Bali, Berkeley, and Hong Kong. *Journal of*

*Sustainability Education*, 1. http://www.journalofsustainabilityeducation.org

Iwan, A., Rao, N., & Poon, K. K. Y. (2018). Characteristics of green schools:

Observations of award-winning green preschools in Bali, Berkeley and Hong

Kong. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, *12*, 140-159.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0973408218783287

Jamali, D., & Carroll, A. (2017). Capturing advances in CSR: Developed versus

developing country perspectives. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *26*, 321-

325. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12157

James, M. L. (2015). Sustainability reporting by small and midsize companies—

Methods, nature and extent of reporting. *Business Studies Journal, 7*(2), 1-17.

http://www.alliedacademies.org/business-studies-journal

Jeong, E., SooCheong, J., Day, J., & Sejin, H. (2014). The impact of eco-friendly

practices on green image and customer attitudes: An investigation in a café

setting. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 41*, 10-20.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.03.002

Jiang, W., Wang, A. X., Zhou, K. Z., & Zhang, C. (2019). Stakeholder relationship

capability and firm innovation: A contingent analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04161-4

Jones, T. M., Harrison, J. S., & Felps, W. (2018). How applying instrumental stakeholder

theory can provide sustainable competitive advantage. *Academy of Management

Review*, *43*, 371-391. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2016.0111

Jung, S., & Ha-Brookshire, J. (2017). Perfect or imperfect duties? Developing a moral

responsibility framework for corporate sustainability from the consumer

perspective. *Corporate Social Responsibility & Environmental Management*, *24*, 326-340. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1414

Kabadayi, A. (2016). A suggested in-service training model based on Turkish preschool teachers 'conceptions for sustainable development. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, *18*, 5-15. https://doi.org/10.1515/jtes-2016-0001

Kahriman-Pamuk, D., & Olgan, R. (2018). Teacher practices and preschool physical environment for education for sustainable development: Eco vs ordinary preschools. *Mersin University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, *14*, 669-683. https://doi.org/10.17860/mersinefd.391312

Kealy, T. (2019). Triple bottom line sustainability reporting: How to make it more tangible. *American Journal of Management*, *19*, 107-140. https://doi.org/10.33423/ajm.v19i5.2634

Kocabas, I., & Bademcioglu, M. (2017). Certification systems of green schools: A comparative analysis. *Educational Process: International Journal*, *6*(4), 74-88. https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2017.64.5

Korkmaz, A., & Guler Yildiz, T. (2017). Assessing preschools using the eco-schools program in terms of educating for sustainable development in early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *25*, 595-611. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2017.1331074

Kumar, V. (2017). Integrating theory and practice in marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 81*, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.80.2.1

Laasch, O. (2018). Beyond the purely commercial business model: Organizational value

logics and the heterogeneity of sustainability business models. *Long Range Planning*, *51*, 158-183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.09.002

Lasen, M., Skamp, K., & Simoncini, K. (2017). Teacher perceptions and self-reported practices of education for sustainability in the early years of primary school: An Australian case study. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *49*, 391-410. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-017-0200-x

Lee, M.-D. (2011). Configuration of external influences: The combined effects of institutions and stakeholders on corporate social responsibility strategies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *102*, 281-298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0814-0

Leonidou, L., Christodoulides, P., Kyrgidou, L., & Palihawadana, D. (2017). Internal drivers and performance consequences of small firm green business strategy: The moderating role of external forces. *Journal of Business Ethics, 140*, 585-606. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2670-9

Leonidou, L. C., Christodoulides, P., & Thwaites, D. (2016). External determinants and financial outcomes of an eco-friendly orientation in smaller manufacturing firms. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *54*, 5-25. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12121

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, *4*, 2-22. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

MacDonald, M. (2015). Early childhood education and sustainability: A living

    curriculum. *Childhood Education, 91*, 332-341.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2015.1090845

Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M., & de Eyto, A. (2018). Ensuring rigor in

    qualitative data analysis: A design research approach to coding combining NVivo

    with traditional material methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,*

    *17.* https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918786362

Marable, S. A. (2015). Green schools -- The implementation and practices of

    environmental education in LEED and USED green ribbon public schools in

    Virginia. *Educational Planning*, *22*, 49-65. http://isep.info/educational-planning-

    journal

McMillen, J. D., Swick, S. D., Frazier, L. M., Bishop, M., & Goodell, L. S. (2019).

    Teachers 'perceptions of sustainable integration of garden education into Head

    Start classrooms: A grounded theory approach. *Journal of Early Childhood*

    *Research*, *17*, 392-407. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19856378

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure

    as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, *83*, 340-363.

    https://doi.org/10.1086/226550

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part

    3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General*

    *Practice*, *24*, 9-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

Nair, S. R., & Little, V. J. (2016). Context, culture and green consumption: A new

framework. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *28*, 169-184. https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2016.1165025

Nelms, T. C. (2015). The problem of delimitation: parataxis, bureaucracy, and Ecuador's popular and solidarity economy. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 21*, 106-126. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12149

Nicole, W. (2018). Advocates for children's health: Working together to reduce harmful environmental exposures. *Environmental Health Perspectives, 126*, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP2423

Nikolaou, I. E., Tasopoulou, K., & Tsagarakis, K. (2018). A typology of green entrepreneurs based on institutional and resource-based views. *The Journal of Entrepreneurship*, *27*, 111-132. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0971355717738601

Panwar, R., Nybakk, E., Pinkse, J., & Hansen, E. (2015). Being good when not doing well: Examining the effect of the economic downturn on small manufacturing firms 'ongoing sustainability-oriented initiatives. *Organization & Environment, 28*, 204-222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026615573842

Papadas, K.-K., Avlonitis, G. J., & Carrigan, M. (2017). Green marketing orientation: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Research, 80*, 236-246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.05.024

Papadas, K.-K., Avlonitis, G. J., Carrigan, M., & Piha, L. (2019). The interplay of strategic and internal green marketing orientation on competitive advantage. *Journal of Business Research, 104*, 632-643. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.00

Pathirana, B. D. (2015). Impact of preschool teacher and physical environment of the preschools on recycling practices within preschool children: A case study from Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, 5*(3), 74-87. http://ijrssh.com

Peattie, K., & Charter, M. (2016). Green marketing. In M. J. Baker (5th ed.), *The marketing book* (pp. 726-756). Butterworth-Heinemann.

Pinelli, M., & Maiolini, R. (2017). Strategies for sustainable development: Organizational motivations, stakeholders 'expectations and sustainability agendas. *Sustainable Development*, *25*, 288-298. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1653

Plevyak, L. H., Tamsukhin, S. M., & Gibson, R. (2020). Building a foundation for sustainable principles: Case studies of K-6 Green Ribbon Schools. *Journal of Sustainability Education*, N.PAG. http://www.journalofsustainabilityeducation.org/

Ponguta, L. A., Rasheed, M. A., Reyes, C. R., & Yousafzai, A. K. (2018). A conceptual model for youth‐led programs as a promising approach to early childhood care and education. *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development, 159*, 71-89. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20233

Ranjan, R. K., & Kushwaha, R. (2017). Impact of green marketing strategies on consumer purchase behaviour. *Review of Management*, *7*, 9-22. http://www.mdrfindia.org/

Ridder, H.-G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research, 10*, 281-305. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z

Roberts, K., Dowell, A., & Nie, J.-B. (2019). Attempting rigour and replicability in thematic analysis of qualitative research data; a case study of codebook development. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *19*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0707-y

Robins, C. S., & Eisen, K. (2017). Strategies for the effective use of NVivo in a large-scale study: Qualitative analysis and the repeal of don't ask, don't tell. *Qualitative Inquiry, 23*, 768-778. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417731089

Rosati, F., & Faria, L. G. D. (2019). Business contribution to the sustainable development agenda: Organizational factors related to early adoption of SDG reporting. *Corporate Social Responsibility & Environmental Management*, *26*, 588-597. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1705

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Schaltegger, S., Hörisch, J., & Freeman, R. E. (2019). Business cases for sustainability: A stakeholder theory perspective. *Organization & Environment*, *32*, 191-212. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026617722882

Schwandt, T. A., Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, *2007*, 11-25. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.223

She, C., & Michelon, G. (2018). Managing stakeholder perceptions: Organized hypocrisy in CSR disclosures on Facebook. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting, 61*, 54-76. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2018.09.004

Silva, S., Nuzum, A. K., & Schaltegger, S. (2019). Stakeholder expectations on sustainability performance measurement and assessment. A systematic literature review. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 217*, 204-205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.01.203

Stoian, C., & Gilman, M. (2017). Corporate social responsibility that "pays": A strategic approach to CSR for SMEs. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *55*, 5-31. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12224

Taylor, A. F., & Butts-Wilmsmeyer, C. (2020). Self-regulation gains in kindergarten related to frequency of green schoolyard use. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101440

Tayouga, S. J., & Gagné, S. A. (2016). The socio-ecological factors that influence the adoption of green infrastructure. *Sustainability*, *8*(12), 1277. https://doi.org/10.3390/su8121277

Theofanidis, D., & Fountouki, A. (2018). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing*, *7*, 155-163. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2552022

Tuttas, C. A. (2015). Lessons learned using web conference technology for online focus group interviews. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*, 122-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732314549602

United Nations Department of Global Communications. (2020). Sustainable development goals. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SDG_Guidelines_AUG_2019_Final.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Selected social characteristics in the United States: 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.* https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_DP02&src=pt

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1979). *The Belmont Report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research.* https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html

Walden University Research Ethics. (2020). *Center for research quality: Research ethics review process by IRB.* https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/research-ethics/review-process

Wall, G. (2018). Beyond sustainable development. *Tourism Recreation Research*, *43*, 390-399. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2018.1475880

Walsh, P. R., & Dodds, R. (2017). Measuring the choice of environmental sustainability strategies in creating a competitive advantage. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *26*, 672-687. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1949

Wang, G., Zhou, X., & Cui, H. (2019). Exploring education for sustainable development in a Chinese kindergarten: An action research. *ECNU Review of Education*, *2*, 497-514. https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531119897638

Warner, B. P., & Elser, M. (2015). How do sustainable schools integrate sustainability education? An assessment of certified sustainable K–12 schools in the United States. *Journal of Environmental Education*, *46*(1).

https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2014.953020

Wee, B., Mason, H., Abdilla, J., & Lupardus, R. (2018). Nationwide perceptions of US

green school practices: Implications for reform and research. *International*

*Research in Geographical & Environmental Education*, *27*, 283-294.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2016.1207995

Weitzner, D., & Deutsch, Y. (2019). Why the time has come to retire instrumental

stakeholder theory. *Academy of Management Review*, *44*, 694-698.

https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0342

Wilson, A. (2015). A guide to phenomenological research. *Nursing Standard, 29*, 38-44.

https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.29.34.38.e8821

World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our Common Future.*

Oxford University Press.

Xie, X., Huo, J., & Zou, H. (2019). Green process innovation, green product innovation,

and corporate financial performance: A content analysis method. *Journal of*

*Business Research, 101,* 697-706. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.01.010

Yang, A., Uysal, N., & Taylor, M. (2018). Unleashing the power of networks:

Shareholder activism, sustainable development and corporate environmental

policy. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *27*, 712-727.

https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2026

Yang, Z., Sun, J., Zhang, Y., & Wang, Y. (2017). Green, green, it's green: A triad model

of technology, culture, and innovation for corporate

sustainability. *Sustainability*, *9*, 1369. https://doi.org/10.3390/su9081369

Yazicioglu, Ö., & Pektas, M. (2018). A comparison of the middle school science programmes in Turkey, Singapore and Kazakhstan. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, *11*, 143-150. https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2019248588

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Zimmer, A. T., & Ha, H. (2017). People, planet and profit: Unintended consequences of legacy building materials. *Journal of Environmental Management*, *204*, 472-485. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2017.09.026

Zoom. (2020). *Security guide. Zoom Video Communications Inc*. https://zoom.us/docs/doc/Zoom-Security-White-Paper.pdf

Zralek, J., & Burgiel, A. (2020). Prospects for a sustainable future: Mapping sustainable behaviors according to consumer perceptions. *Review of Business*, *40*(1), 35-50. https://www.stjohns.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/Review-of-Business-Jan-2020.pdf

# Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Sir/Ma'am,

Thank you for expressing interest in my study! As promised, I have attached a copy of the informed consent form with additional information (expectations, benefits, etc.) for your review. If you consent to participate, I will follow-up by phone to coordinate a date/time for us to interview. Please let me know if you have any questions.

I hope you participate. Thank you for your time and consideration!

//signed//
Henry Smith, DBA Student
Walden University, College of Management and Technology

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. PRE-INTERVIEW – Clarifying Standards & Expectations
   a. Researcher introduces his/herself and informs participant of interview duration
   b. Researcher explains the purpose of the study and offer to answer any questions
   c. Researcher provides and/or request a signed copy of the informed consent form
   d. Researcher provides information on participant's validation and follow-up timeline
   e. Researcher schedule/confirms interview time for quiet location w/limited interruption

   *Note: Consider including in the invitation to participate and/or the informed consent form. Revisit each point as appropriate on interview day using a customized script.*

2. THE INTERVIEW – Meaningful, Descriptive Data Collection
   a. The objective is to prompt responses using the baseline interview questions
      ✓ How thoughtful is the participant's explanation of answer(s) given?
      ✓ What actions did he/she perform?
      ✓ Can you identify the outcome based on the participants' actions?
   b. Probe beyond generic responses
      ✓ Level 1 – Ask participant to describe specific experience.
      ✓ Level 2 – Ask participant to describe feelings from the experience.
      ✓ Level 3 – Ask participant would they change the outcome, if necessary.

   *Note: Consider previous response and the potential to add value when probing Level 1- 3.*

3. POST-INTERVIEW – Data Analysis & Transcript Review
   a. Review transcripts and consider participant's answers to interview questions
      ✓ Did the responses give clarity to any codebook theme(s)?
      ✓ Did the responses give clarity to any emerging theme(s)?
      ✓ If yes, how so? If not, how so?
      ✓ Assign code accordingly and/or add theme to codebook.
   b. Consider how the participant responses are aligned with the research question
   c. Consider how the participant responses are aligned with the conceptual framework
   d. Review your assessment of themes using participant's validation, where applicable

   *Note: Not all-inclusive for analysis, simply a practical approach for using the codebook in transcript review.*

4. BEST PRACTICES – Useful Tips for Effective Interviews
   a. Use proven sampling techniques, i.e., purposeful sampling method
   b. Maintain baseline question(s) for consistency across participants
   c. Take notes during the interview and remain aware of non-verbal cues
   d. Be aware of potential researcher/participant biases
      ✓ Halo/Horn: The interviewer is influenced by overall impression.
      ✓ Affective Heuristic: The interviewer current emotion influence decision.
      ✓ Confirmation Bias: The interviewer beliefs are validated; lack of consideration towards other factors influence decision.
      ✓ Anchoring Bias: The interviewer is influenced by initial information given and prioritize it above ensuing information received.

Appendix C: Data Management Plan

1. Purpose. The purpose of the data management plan is to provide a transparent framework for the collection, organization, analysis, and storage of the data in the study.

2. Data Collection. The data will be collected and transcribed using Zoom videoconferencing software. Information on zoom can be found at https://zoom.us/.

3. Data Organization. The data will be analyzed and organized using NVivo software. Information on NVivo can be found at https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/resources/blog/empowering-all-qualitative-researchers-with-techno.

4. Data Security. The data will be secured using Zoom and NVivo. Zoom enables FERPA/HIPAA compliance and provides 256-bit AES encryption. Zoom security and compliance information can be found at https://zoom.us/security. NVivo is HIPAA compliant. NVivo security and compliance information can be found at https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/resources/blog/nvivo-transcription-is-hipaa-compliant.

5. Ethical considerations.
    a. Participant's Recruitment. Researcher will email Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) to all personnel meeting the inclusion criteria. Interview time will be coordinated via phone and confirmed via email.
    b. Data Organization: The researcher will be the owner of the user account for Zoom and NVivo in which data will be transcribed and analyzed.
    c. Data Security: Data security will include Zoom and NVivo infrastructure security measures. Additionally, signed consent forms, transcriptions, and other documents that contain confidential data will be stored on an external hard drive in a fireproof safe. Stored data will be destroyed after 5 years.

Appendix D: Codebook

| Theme | Code Name (Abbreviated) | Description | When to use | When not to use |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Environmental Sustainability | Mindful of how business practice affects the environment<br><br>(Eco-conscious – ECC) | Any evidence that indicates the immediate environment or earth is the reason for perspective or efforts | Use when a business practice is directly related to having an environmental impact | When referring to speculative practices that are not represented in business practice |
| Business Sustainability | Mindful of how business practice affects competitiveness<br><br>(Business Performance – BP) | Any evidence that indicates business performance or competitiveness is the reason for perspective or efforts | Use when a business practice is directly related to having an impact on business performance | When referring to speculative practices that are not represented in business practice |
| Health and Wellbeing for Sustainability | Mindful of how business practice affects the health and wellness of others<br><br>(Health conscious – HC) | Any evidence that indicates the health and wellness is the reason for perspective or efforts | Use when a business practice is directly related to preserving health and wellness | When referring to speculative practices not represented in business practice |
| Managing Stakeholders Expectations | Mindful of how stakeholders and others can affect the organization<br><br>(Stakeholders – ST) | Any evidence that indicates perspective or efforts are a result of stakeholders' influence, perception, or pressure | Use when a business practice is directly related to managing stakeholders' expectations | When referring to speculative reasoning not reflective in current or future business practice |
| Partnerships and Community Involvement* | Mindful of how partnerships and community involvement affect the organization<br><br>(Partnerships – PC) | Any evidence that indicates perspective or efforts are a result of partnerships and community involvement | Use when a business practice is directly related to partnerships and community involvement | When referring to speculative reasoning not reflective in current or future business practice |

* Emerging theme added to codebook during data analysis

## Appendix E: Request for Permission

**From:** ███████████████████████████████
**Sent:** Thursday, July 9, 2020 1:44:09 PM
**To:** ██████████████████████
**Subject:** Re: Request for Permission

Hi Henry,

Thanks for reaching out! Sure, please feel free to use the figure in your doctoral capstone, considering a proper accreditation/citation of our article is given.

Good luck!

Best wishes and stay well.

████████

---

**From:** Henry Smith
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 1, 2020 3:25:49 PM
**To:** ████████████████████████
**Cc:** ███████████████████████
**Subject:** Request for Permission

Hello ████████ – I hope this message finds you well.

I would like to request permission to use the figure titled "Integrative theoretical framework underpinning corporate social responsibility and corporate sustainability."

The figure is from "Understanding the Conceptual Evolutionary Path and Theoretical Underpinnings of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sustainability" by M. Ashrafi, G. M. Magnan, M., Adams, and T. R. Walker, 2020, *Sustainability, 12*, p. 760. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12030760 Copyright 2020 by MDPI.

I confirmed the MDPI Open Access Information and Policy allows for fair use with proper accreditation and citation. However, I wanted to obtain written permission to adapt the figure for inclusion in my doctoral capstone. Please let me know if I may adapt for use. I look forward to your response.

Thank you!


Henry L. Smith II
Student, DBA Program
Walden University