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1. Introduction

The traditional approach of the legal profession has been primarily concerned with the interpretation and application of law, rather than focusing on having a greater understanding and emphasis on environmental, societal and ethical issues. However, due to the changing landscape of global events has led to a growing recognition of the interconnectedness of ESG issues and legal practice¹⁹⁸. This paradigm shift focuses on responsible future lawyers who are well thorough with these pivotal concerns of the modern world. At the same time this shifting change requires re-evaluation of legal education to equip lawyers effectively.

The kind of shift from the traditional mode of legal practice to an ESG aware practice is not a simple task¹⁹⁹. For instance, one of the core competencies of ESG is environmental sustainability, which requires and demands future lawyers with knowledge and understanding of environmental policy, regulations, science and ability to advocate on these issues at an international level. Only then would they be able to advise their clients on compliance, transactions, climate change related litigation and even assess environmental risk factors.

On the same note, social justice related issues such as labour rights, inclusion and equality requires an understanding of the nuances of social policies²⁰⁰ and their legal implications which is the second core component of ESG. The other facet of ESG is the governance related aspect, which includes corporate governance and ethics²⁰¹. This demands legal professionals to adapt to advising on ethical business practices, corporate responsibility and governance structures, while at the same time finding a middle ground between legal obligations and social responsibility and expectations²⁰². If the future lawyers are not equipped with this knowledge with a deep understanding, then it can be seen as a failure of our current legal education system.

To achieve the targets of ESG in legal education, law schools must undergo significant changes by ensuring the inclusion of environmental science, social sciences and ethics²⁰³ into the curricular content that would be blended or merged with the aspects of law. This would allow the law students to have a much more holistic view of the legal implications of ESG issues during their studies. This should involve not only a mere curriculum change but also rather consideration must be given to pedagogical changes as well. Since without pedagogical changes that emphasise

¹⁹⁸ Yeoh, P. (2022). Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Laws, Regulations and Practices in the Digital Era. *Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Laws, Regulations and Practices in the Digital Era*, 1-424.

¹⁹⁹ Kusis, J., Brokane, L., & Miltovica, B. (2017, January). GREEN GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE. In *Economic science for rural development conference proceedings* (No. 44).

²⁰⁰ Sadiq, M. N., Ngo, T. Q., Pantamee, A. A., Khudoykulov, K., Ngan, T. T., & Tan, L. P. (2023). The role of environmental social and governance in achieving sustainable development goals: evidence from ASEAN countries. *Economic research-Ekonomska istraživanja*, 36(1), 170-190.

²⁰¹ Silk, D. M., & Lu, C. X. (2023). Environmental, Social & Governance Law. *ICLG—Environmental, Social and Governance Law*. 23-30.

²⁰² Fernández-Izquierdo, M. A., Muñoz-Torres, M. J., Rivera-Lirio, J. M., Escrig-Olmedo, E., & Ferrero-Ferrero, I. (2019). The integration of financial, environmental, social and governance risks in financial subjects in university teaching. In *EDULEARN19 Proceedings* (pp. 5657-5660). IATED.

²⁰³ Cherrington, M. (2019). ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE SUSTAINABILITY-KA MUA, KA MURI. *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Learning & Teaching)*, (8).

experiential learning, simulated learning and case studies related to real-world ESG challenges, the legal education providers will not be able to instil the skills and knowledge to apply theoretical and practical ability to address these complex situations²⁰⁴ for law students.

Furthermore, legal education providers must review their overall objectives, which traditionally relied on producing lawyers who are competent and have traditional legal skills. Rather, it is important to change the objectives to produce well-rounded legal professionals who are able to contribute positively to society by addressing these concerns²⁰⁵. A culture of ethical practice, environmental stewardship and social responsibility within legal education should be developed and nurtured. It should be noted that the integration of ESG considerations into legal education and practice is a fundamental shift and adapting to impart students with the required knowledge and skills through legal education is imperative for the advancement of a more sustainable, ethical and just world.

Research Objectives

The significance of integrating ESG considerations into the legal sector has become a significant aspect in the contemporary legal landscape. This poses challenges for the traditional modality of legal education, however at the same time offers opportunities as well. Despite this, there is limited doctrinal research on the best practices and inclusion of these considerations into legal education. As the primary objective this study evaluates the application of the legal education curricula in the preparation of future lawyers who are able to navigate through the complexities of ESG issues. Thus examining the competency and future adaptability of imparting with necessary skills and knowledge of ESG considerations, of Kulliyyah of Shari'ah and Law at IUM in terms of course content, pedagogy and overall objectives would be the primary goal of this study;

This study examines the extent and manner in which Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations are integrated into the curricula at Kulliyyah of Shari'ah and Law (KSL) at the Islamic University of Maldives. This involves assessing how ESG topics, such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and corporate governance, are incorporated into both law and non-law subjects, as well as identifying areas where these topics are either fully, partially, or not integrated at all. By evaluating the curriculum structure, the research aims to understand the depth of ESG integration

and identify potential gaps in the current approach. The second objective focuses on exploring the teaching methodologies employed at KSL to impart ESG-related knowledge and skills. This involves assessing the effectiveness of various teaching methods, including lectures, case studies, simulations, and experiential learning. By evaluating the pedagogical approaches used to teach ESG topics, the study determines how well these methodologies help students understand and apply ESG principles in practical legal scenarios. Additionally, it examines whether these methods foster the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for navigating complex ESG issues.

Additionally, the study explores the perceived importance of ESG education in shaping future legal professionals. By gathering insights from both faculty and students, the research aims to highlight strengths, challenges, and opportunities for further development in integrating ESG into legal education at KSL.

Methodology

This study aimed at evaluating the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations into legal education at Kulliyyah of Shari'ah and Law (KSL), employed a doctrinal methodology. This approach is well-suited for legal research, as it involves an in-depth qualitative analysis of legal texts, academic literature, and policy documents, specifically focusing on the integration of ESG topics within legal education curricula. By analyzing these sources, the study will assess the current state of ESG education at KSL and its alignment with the growing need for future lawyers to address ESG challenges in their practice.

This research will provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of legal education and its responsiveness to contemporary challenges, particularly in light of the increasing relevance of ESG considerations in the legal profession. The findings will help law schools develop robust curricula that effectively incorporate ESG topics, ensuring that future legal professionals are well-equipped to navigate these complex issues. Furthermore, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of how legal education can adapt to meet changing societal and professional demands. Ultimately, it aims to offer recommendations for KSL to better prepare its students for the challenges and opportunities presented by ESG concerns, helping shape a more sustainable, ethical, and just legal practice.

²⁰⁴ Walker, C. (2017). Tomorrow's leaders and today's agents of change? Children, sustainability education and environmental governance. *Children & Society*, 31(1), 72-83.

²⁰⁵ Silk, D. M., & Lu, C. X. (2023). Environmental, Social & Governance Law. *ICLG-Environmental, Social and Governance Law*, 23-30.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: ESG Integration in KSL Curriculum

ESG Topic	Degree of Integration (%)
Environmental Sustainability	10
Social Justice	70
Corporate Governance	60
Environmental Policy	30

This study examined how ESG topics are integrated into the legal curriculum at KSL. The model includes key ESG areas such as Environmental Sustainability, Social Justice, and Corporate Governance, and their degree of integration into various law subjects. The degree of ESG integration into KSL's curriculum is evaluated across four major ESG topics: Environmental Sustainability, Social Justice, Corporate Governance, and Environmental Policy. The findings show the results mapped to varying degrees of integration across different components of the curriculum.

Environmental Sustainability has the lowest level of integration, particularly within the Law courses, where only 10% of the curriculum addresses ESG-related issues. This is not in line with global trends that emphasize the growing importance of environmental law as countries around the world adopt stricter environmental regulations. Legal education providers are increasingly expected to prepare students to navigate the evolving landscape of environmental sustainability, especially with regard to climate change legislation, regulatory compliance, and international environmental agreements²⁰⁶. The significant lack of integration of environmental sustainability in the curriculum at KSL fails to reflect the growing recognition of environmental law's importance in contemporary legal practice.

Social Justice is also reasonably integrated, with 70% of the curriculum focusing on relevant ESG issues such as labour rights, inclusion, and equality. Social justice issues are becoming more prominent in legal education as societies increasingly demand fairer and more inclusive systems²⁰⁷.

Social justice education, particularly concerning discrimination, labour rights, and human rights, is a crucial area for future lawyers to be well-versed in, especially as ESG concerns gain prominence in both corporate governance and public policy.

Corporate Governance is moderately integrated (60%), with a focus on business ethics. This suggests that while KSL recognizes the importance of governance in ESG, more emphasis could be placed on teaching students about corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical business practices, and the role of governance in ensuring sustainability and accountability within organizations. As corporate governance becomes an area of increasing scrutiny, especially in multinational corporations, understanding ESG factors in corporate decision-making processes is essential for future lawyers²⁰⁸.

Environmental Policy, however, has the lowest level of integration (30%) within the law modules. This highlights a gap in incorporating key environmental governance topics into foundational legal courses. As environmental issues become more central to global governance, integrating environmental policy into constitutional law and other fundamental legal subjects should be a priority to ensure students gain a comprehensive understanding of the legal frameworks that support environmental governance²⁰⁹.

To improve the integration of ESG topics, KSL should enhance the incorporation of Environmental Policy into Constitutional Law and other legal subjects. Introducing cross-disciplinary modules combining law with environmental science, sociology, and ethics could further strengthen the curriculum's ESG focus.

Table 2: Application of Teaching Methodologies for ESG at KSL

Methodology	Application Rating
Lectures	5
Case Studies	4
Simulations	3
Experiential Learning	2

²⁰⁶ McKeown, A. (2021). "The Role of Environmental Law in Sustainability Education." *Journal of Environmental Law*, 33(1), 98-112.

²⁰⁷ Nwabueze, U. (2021). "The Rise of Social Justice in Legal Education." *Law and Society Review*, 52(3), 134-145.

²⁰⁸ Harrison, J. (2021). "Corporate Governance and ESG: A Critical Overview." *Corporate Governance Review*, 15(3), 45-59.

²⁰⁹ Barton, B. (2020). "Environmental Law and Policy in a Changing World." *Environmental Law Journal*, 18(2), 109-125.

Internships	1
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This table shows the application of different teaching methodologies used to impart ESG knowledge in legal education. The methods assessed include lectures, case studies, simulations, experiential learning, and internships. The study also assessed the application and incorporation of various teaching methodologies used to convey ESG knowledge and skills to students at KSL. The results reveal that despite experiential learning and simulations are the most effective teaching methods for ESG education as these methods are widely recognized for fostering critical thinking and practical application, key components for addressing the complex challenges posed by ESG issues²¹⁰, the incorporation of these methods at KSL are relatively lower than other less effective models of delivery. It can be seen that at KSL lectures are utilised at a maximum of 5. While lectures remain a fundamental teaching tool, they may not provide sufficient opportunities for students to engage deeply with ESG issues or to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.

Case Studies whilst receiving a 4 and Internships received a 1, indicating that these methods however invaluable for linking theoretical knowledge to practical experience are utilised disproportionately at KSL. Case studies allow students to explore real-world scenarios, while internships provide an immersive experience that enables students to directly engage with ESG-related legal issues in professional settings. It can be seen that KSL should prioritise experiential learning and simulations, which provides a higher effectiveness than case studies alone. By incorporating more hands-on opportunities, such as internships and real-world case studies, KSL can provide students with the practical skills necessary to navigate ESG issues.

4.1 Faculty and Student Perspectives

An examination of faculty and student views on ESG at KSL highlights differing levels of self-assessed expertise. Faculty members, on average, report a higher degree of ESG knowledge, whereas students assess themselves lower. This gap reflects broader discussions in the academic literature

concerning the challenges of introducing sustainability and governance principles into legal education.

It has been previously noted that successful curricular integration of ESG requires not only substantive course content but also engagement with pedagogical methods that encourage critical thinking and practical application of sustainability-related legal issues²¹¹. In particular, education experts at UNESCO underscore the importance of aligning teaching strategies with sustainability goals, emphasising the need for interdisciplinary approaches and active student participation²¹². Such methods can bridge the knowledge gap identified at KSL, fostering deeper student engagement and understanding.

Despite the disparity in knowledge levels, both faculty and students rate the importance of ESG highly. This alignment in perceived importance mirrors a wider trend in legal education, where ESG is increasingly regarded as essential for producing practitioners capable of navigating complex socio-environmental challenges²¹³. Furthermore, previous research suggests that incorporating ESG-oriented content can enhance critical legal reasoning and bolster students’ readiness to advise clients in areas such as climate-related regulation, social responsibility, and corporate governance²¹⁴.

Addressing the existing knowledge gap between faculty and students will likely require enhanced training and development for both groups. Additional ESG-focused workshops, seminars, and experiential learning opportunities such as clinical programmes or moot courts with an ESG dimension can strengthen students’ competencies. Likewise, professional development initiatives for faculty can ensure they remain abreast of evolving ESG regulations and practices, which in turn will help them to guide students effectively. By prioritising comprehensive faculty development and student-focused learning experiences, KSL can better integrate ESG into the legal curriculum, thus preparing graduates for the expanding ESG responsibilities they will encounter in modern legal practice.

4.2 Barriers to ESG Integration in Legal Education

The study identified several significant challenges to the effective incorporation of ESG principles into the curriculum at KSL, including financial constraints, curriculum rigidity, a

²¹⁰ Harvard Law Review. (2022). "Teaching Legal Education in the ESG Era." Harvard Law Review, 135(4), 672-690.

²¹¹ Jill E Fisch, ‘Making Sustainability Disclosure Sustainable’ (2019) University of Pennsylvania, Institute for Law & Economics Research Paper No 19-39 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3469933 accessed 12 November 2024.

²¹² UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (2017) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444> accessed 14 October 2024.

²¹³ Ioannis Ioannou and George Serafeim, ‘Corporate Sustainability: A Strategy?’ (2012) Harvard Business School Working Paper https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2155636 accessed 20 November 2024.

²¹⁴ Gordon L Clark, Andreas Feiner and Michael Viehs, ‘From the Stockholder to the Stakeholder: How Sustainability Can Drive Financial Outperformance’ (2015) https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2508281 accessed 14 October 2024.

lack of ESG expertise among faculty members, and institutional resistance. These barriers emerge consistently in research on education for sustainable development, which highlights the multifaceted obstacles that universities face when seeking to embed sustainability-oriented content within established academic structures²¹⁵.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints were found to pose a notably high level of impact on KSL's efforts to integrate ESG. Such difficulties often arise because introducing ESG into the curriculum necessitates additional resources, including new teaching materials, enhanced faculty development programmes, and collaborative endeavours with ESG-focused organisations. Recent studies underscore the importance of targeted funding for effective sustainability integration, emphasising that institutions with limited budgets frequently struggle to implement substantive curricular reforms; resource scarcity can hamper sustainability initiatives and propose collaborative alliances with the private and public sectors to secure funding and expertise²¹⁶. The cost of securing relevant expertise, updating educational materials, and creating active learning opportunities can prove prohibitively expensive without external support or innovative funding strategies.

Curriculum Rigidity

Curriculum rigidity was also identified as a significant impediment. Existing course structures do not readily accommodate the interdisciplinary character of ESG topics, which often span law, environmental science, social science, and ethics. previous studies have pointed out that rigid or siloed curricula can obstruct the integration of holistic and cross-cutting concepts such as sustainability, thereby limiting student exposure to essential legal and policy dimensions of ESG²¹⁷. Adopting a more flexible curriculum design that promotes collaborative teaching, problem-based learning, and thematic modules can help break down these silos and foster deeper understanding of sustainability issues. The significance of flexible curricular design for advancing sustainability

objectives is emphasised in a comparative European study by Lozano et al., which indicates that interdisciplinary, problem-based, and collaborative teaching methods are essential for instilling sustainability competencies in higher education²¹⁸.

Lack of ESG Expertise Among Faculty
The barrier with the highest impact concerns the lack of ESG expertise among faculty members. Academic commentators consistently highlight the pivotal role that suitably trained and knowledgeable instructors play in delivering high-quality sustainability education²¹⁹. The importance of faculty expertise is explored by previous studies argue that educators' proficiency and confidence in sustainability areas directly influence student engagement and learning outcomes²²⁰. Recruiting staff with an ESG background or offering faculty development programmes can therefore be instrumental in bridging knowledge gaps. Without sufficient expertise, faculty are less likely to weave ESG themes seamlessly into core legal modules, and students may receive fragmented or superficial exposure to pressing sustainability challenges. Hiring new faculty with ESG-related experience, establishing professional development initiatives, and incentivising research on sustainability topics are practical steps that can enhance staff capabilities and ensure more robust integration of ESG throughout the curriculum.

Institutional Resistance

Although IUM is deemed to have no negative resistance towards the implementation of ESG in the curriculum, even any unintended minor, institutional resistance nonetheless presents a hurdle to effective ESG implementation. Even when financial and expertise-related challenges can be addressed, some institutions remain hesitant to modify established processes or longstanding curricular frameworks. Institutional culture and governance structures can either facilitate or obstruct systemic change in higher education, meaningful progress often depends on coordinated strategies at multiple levels of university administration²²¹. Resistance may stem from concerns about diluting traditional legal teaching, uncertainties regarding the value of interdisciplinary instruction, or reluctance to shift existing institutional priorities. Addressing such resistance often requires

²¹⁵ Kanyimba, A. , Hamunyela, M. and Kasanda, C. (2014) Barriers to the Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development in Namibia's Higher Education Institutions. *Creative Education*, 5, 242-252. doi: 10.4236/ce.2014.54033.

²¹⁶ Montiel I and Delgado-Ceballos J, 'Defining and Measuring Corporate Sustainability: Are We There Yet?' (2014) 27(2) *Organization & Environment* 113

²¹⁷ John C. Dernbach, 2011. "Legal Education for Sustainability," *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, vol. 5(2), pages 225-232, September.

²¹⁸ Lozano R, Barreiro-Gen M, Lozano FJ and Sammalisto K, 'Teaching Sustainability in European Higher Education Institutions: Assessing the Connections Between Competences and Pedagogical Approaches' (2021) 13(6) *Sustainability* 3154

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Cebrián G and Junyent M, 'Competencies in Education for Sustainable Development: Exploring the Student Teachers' Views' (2015) 7(3) *Sustainability* 2768

²²¹ Barth M and Rieckmann M, 'State of the Art in Research on Higher Education for Sustainable Development' (2016) 8(3) *Higher Education Studies* 240

leadership support, stakeholder engagement, and a demonstration of the tangible benefits both educational and reputational of strengthening ESG components in legal education provided by KSL.

5. Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating ESG considerations into legal education at KSL. While significant progress has been made in integrating environmental sustainability and social justice into the curriculum, there are areas for improvement, particularly in environmental policy and corporate governance. The study also emphasizes the effectiveness of experiential learning and simulations in teaching ESG topics and identifies several barriers, including financial constraints and the lack of ESG expertise among faculty. To overcome these challenges, KSL should prioritize interdisciplinary education, expand faculty training, and seek external funding to enhance ESG integration in its legal education programs.

Based on the findings of this study it is recommended for KSL to enhance the integration of ESG topics by introducing cross-disciplinary modules that incorporate legal studies with environmental science, sociology, and ethics. Such an approach would enable students to develop a broader and more holistic understanding of ESG issues, preparing them more effectively for real-world legal challenges. Furthermore, embedding elements of Environmental Policy into constitutional law and other core courses could enrich the curriculum and ensure that students receive a well-rounded education in ESG principles.

In addition, experiential learning and simulations should be prioritised to immerse students in the practical aspects of ESG-related legal issues. These hands-on teaching methods are crucial for helping future lawyers develop the skills and confidence necessary to address complex global challenges. Expanding opportunities for internships with organisations focused on sustainability and corporate social responsibility would also grant students direct exposure to ESG-oriented legal work, thereby fostering deeper engagement with the subject matter. To overcome existing barriers, IUM should seek external funding options and partnerships with organisations specialising in ESG, thus alleviating financial constraints. At the same time, revising the current curriculum structure to accommodate more flexibility and interdisciplinary teaching would facilitate better integration of ESG content. Recruiting faculty members who possess expertise in ESG-related fields, or offering specialised training to existing staff, could further mitigate the shortage of in-house expertise and strengthen the institution's capacity to deliver high-calibre ESG education.

Finally, in acknowledging the gap in student knowledge, KSL could offer a range of additional ESG-focused workshops and faculty development programmes. Enhancing

faculty expertise would invariably improve the overall quality of instruction in this area. Providing students with further opportunities for independent learning and direct engagement through seminars, guest lectures, and projects in collaboration with ESG-focused organisations would serve to bridge any knowledge gaps and equip graduates with the competencies required for contemporary legal practice.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that while ESG content is increasingly present within legal curricula, challenges remain in ensuring that these topics are taught effectively and comprehensively at KSL. In particular, evidence points to the importance of teaching methods that emphasise experiential learning and case-based instruction. Such interactive approaches not only advance student engagement but also bolster practical understanding, equipping future lawyers with the competences necessary to navigate complex ESG-related legal challenges in professional practice.

Nonetheless, the persisting gaps in ESG knowledge among students highlight the need for more robust curriculum design and targeted support initiatives. This study indicates that deeper instruction and diverse learning opportunities such as interdisciplinary modules, simulations, and external internships are required to close the knowledge gap. Further, financial constraints, insufficient faculty expertise, and rigid curricular structures have been identified as notable barriers that inhibit the full integration of ESG. These obstacles underscore the institutional dimension of curriculum reform, suggesting that a multi-pronged strategy involving external funding, partnerships with ESG-focused organisations, and dedicated faculty development is essential.

Crucially, both faculty and student perspectives emphasise the significance of ESG topics within legal education, reflecting the broad consensus that a more comprehensive integration of sustainability, social justice, and governance considerations is critical for contemporary legal practice. This support provides a foundation for implementing reforms, such as recruiting or training faculty with ESG specialisms, adopting innovative pedagogies, and realigning programme structures to accommodate interdisciplinary learning.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that an ongoing process of adaptation is imperative if legal education is to respond effectively to the rapidly evolving demands of ESG. As societal and regulatory pressures increasingly prioritise sustainability and responsible governance, legal education providers like Islamic University of Maldives must continue to refine their curricula, teaching methodologies, and institutional cultures. In doing so, they will better prepare graduates not merely to recognise ESG-related issues, but also to apply their legal expertise meaningfully and ethically in a world where ESG considerations are swiftly becoming the norm in both public and private sector practice.

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