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Sustainability Success in Language Education: A Critical Conceptual Synthesis

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Abstract

Sustainability-oriented language education connects language learning with ecological understanding, action, and relationships among languages, knowledges, and communities. These purposes complicate judgments of success because a well-written text, a reported disposition, and a claim of knowledge co-creation may concern different achievements. This critical conceptual synthesis compares Eco-ELT, transformative language teaching for sustainability, language education for sustainable development, and transepistemic education. Drawing on argument-based evaluation, reasoning about educational purpose, and assessment validation, it examines educational aims, evaluation of achievement, and comparison of success claims. The literature supports comparison of aims and practices, but its uneven evidence base does not support an overall effectiveness ranking. Resource appraisal, task performance, self-report, and conceptual argument support different conclusions and require justification suited to each claim. The contribution distinguishes extending evidence-based support for an asserted achievement, adding an explicitly justified educational criterion, and silently substituting another achievement or standard. Further evidence may strengthen a claim, it but cannot by itself justify giving priority to a new purpose. Existing purposes also remain open to criticism. The synthesis explains how comparison can preserve differences in achievement while requiring justification of both the evidence and the authority to determine educational values.

Keywords sustainability-oriented language education, educational aims, programme evaluation, epistemic authority, conceptual synthesis

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INTRODUCTION

Judgments of success in language education become more demanding when communication is linked to ecological understanding, action, and relationships among languages, knowledges, and communities (Jodoin, 2020; Maijala et al., 2024; Meighan, 2023b; Saiful, 2023). These connections broaden the purposes of language teaching. A communicative product, a reported disposition, and an account of knowledge exchange may all have educational values, depending on what is claimed and how it is supported. Comparison therefore requires attention to both the achievement being judged and the reasons for valuing it.

The Problem of Evaluation Sustainability Success

Judging educational success requires evidence and reasons for valuing an achievement. Language programme evaluation examines interventions, conditions, and consequences, while argument-based evaluation asks how findings support particular interpretations and decisions (Gruba et al., 2016; Norris, 2016). Reasoning about educational purpose asks why an achievement should matter (Biesta, 2009). Sustainability education also provides accounts of competencies, assessment, and impact (O'Flaherty & Liddy, 2018; Redman & Wiek, 2021; Redman et al., 2021; Wiek et al., 2011). The question is how to use these resources when the approaches being compared pursue aims that overlap but differ in meaning.

Language education already distinguishes among kinds of sustainability achievement. Writing and nature empathy have been assessed separately, relational valuation has been followed up after one month, and environmental aspirations have been distinguished from prescribed behaviour (Jodoin, 2022; Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025; Saiful & Yunianti, 2025). Pedagogical mapping identifies variation in outcomes and limits to direct effectiveness comparisons (Al-Hakimi & Widyaningrum, 2026). Multilingual, transepistemic, and decolonial writing scholarship also addresses community knowledge and evaluative authority (Barrett et al., 2025; Meighan, 2023a; Shah, 2026; Sun & Li, 2026). The contribution sought here is to explain how these judgments relate and what their comparison requires.

Purpose and Research Questions

This critical conceptual synthesis compares ecological English language teaching (Eco-ELT), transformative language teaching for sustainability (TLS), language education for sustainable development (LESD), and transepistemic education (TEE). It examines when comparison calls for further evidence, when it introduces another educational criterion, and when it silently changes the achievement being evaluated. A common criterion may be useful alongside the original purposes of an approach, provided its educational relevance is justified. Both the evidence and the purpose therefore need scrutiny. Making them explicit allows that scrutiny without establishing that either is adequate. The three research questions guide this paper are:

RQ1. What educational aims do the sustainability-oriented language-education approaches pursue?
RQ2. How is the achievement of these aims evaluated?
RQ3. What similarities and differences emerge when success claims are compared across the approaches?

CONCEPTUAL SCOPE AND RATIONALE

The four approaches differ in pedagogical scope and in what they regard as worthwhile achievement. These differences allow an examination of success across language learning and teacher education without treating the approaches as equivalent interventions. The approaches are the subject of comparison. The evaluation and reasoning about the educational purpose guide their interpretation. The contribution lies in the relationships developed through this conceptual comparison, rather than in a new empirical evaluation or a general theory of success (Jaakkola, 2020).

Four Approaches to Sustainability in Language Education

There are four approaches connecting language education with environmental and social concerns at different conceptual levels (Table 1). Eco-ELT is a broad environmental orientation; TLS is a model for didactic integration; LESD is a formulation linking language and sustainability; and TEE is an account of knowledge co-creation. Communication, ethical judgment, and participation recur across them. Yet the name of an approach does not determine the aim of every application. The comparison therefore examines particular commitments and claims, without assigning each approach an exclusive educational function.

Table 1. *Four Approaches and their Roles in the Comparison*

Approach	Educational orientation	Comparative significance
Eco-ELT	Ecological understanding, ethical relationships, and environmental research and praxis in English teaching (Saiful, 2020, 2023)	Variation among language performance, dispositions, resources, and institutional practices
TLS	Didactic integration informed by holism, pluralism, and action orientation (Maijala et al., 2024)	Relationships among framework use, communicative work, competence, and transformation
LESD	Environmental literacy, complex sustainability understanding, and reflective judgment through language education (Jodoin, 2020, 2022)	Educational purposes distinguished from hoped-for environmental consequences
TEE	Relationships among languages, knowledges, land, and community through respectful co-creation (Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025)	Authority to recognise knowledge and judge achievement

Note. The orientations overlap and do not rank educational value.

Boundaries of the Comparison

The focal sources explicitly develop, apply, or evaluate an identified approach or its components. A shared theme or a citation alone does not establish this connection. Related education for sustainable development (ESD), model-overview, and decolonial scholarship provides context for the analysis (Chaka, 2023; Maijala & Kuusalu, 2025; Manyasi, 2024; Ngo & Le-Khanh, 2025). DEEP, comprising Diversity, Exploration, Expression, and Partnership, also connects world-language education with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but is outside the focal analysis (Kong, 2025). This selection supports the conceptual contrasts pursued here without representing the whole field.

The source-level matrix records 36 publications available to this synthesis by October 2026, including 35 originals and one secondary synthesis. These totals count publications, not independent empirical studies. Swedish, Finnish, German, and Spanish settings broaden the comparison beyond English teaching, although findings cannot be assumed to transfer between languages or institutions (Broermann et al., 2025; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025; Orsatti, 2026). The uneven coverage limits generalisation but does not, by itself, determine the conceptual authority of an argument.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Comparing success claims requires attention to both support and purpose. One question concerns the grounds for an asserted achievement, and the other concerns why it should count as success. A convincing purpose does not demonstrate its realisation, and a well-supported finding does not establish its educational priority. Argument-based evaluation and reasoning about educational purpose connect these questions while retaining the distinction between evidence-based and normative justification (Biesta, 2009; Gruba et al., 2016; Kane, 2013). The framework guides interpretation rather than prescribes an assessment instrument.

Claims and their Support

An educational aim names an intended achievement. An achievement is a performance, experience, capacity, or change asserted to have occurred. A success claim judges it against a stated or implied standard. Educational worth concerns the reasons for valuing it. Argument-based evaluation examines how evidence, warrants, and assumptions connect a finding with an interpretation or decision, including alternative explanations and wider implications (Gruba et al., 2016). Assessment validation likewise distinguishes support for interpreting a score from support for using it (Kane, 2013). These distinctions help assess whether conclusions about development or a programme are warranted by performance on a task.

Educational Purposes and Evaluative Standards

Qualification concerns capacities and judgment, socialisation concerns participation in existing practices, and subjectification concerns becoming a subject with some independence from those practices (Biesta, 2009). These purposes can overlap or conflict, so effectiveness for one does not establish its priority over another. Agency, educational purpose, and epistemic justice also inform TLS, while sustainability competencies specify capacities such as systems thinking, normative judgment, and implementation (Gericke, 2025; Kuusalu, 2025; Redman & Wiek, 2021; Wiek et al., 2011). These resources clarify what an activity values without placing approaches in exclusive categories or equating measurable outcomes with educational worth.

Three Analytical Dimensions

The three dimensions in Table 2 organise comparison around educational aims, evaluation of achievement, and success claims. Within these dimensions, description identifies what a source proposes or reports, evidence-based appraisal examines its support, and normative criticism considers the reasons and standards for judging success. Questions developed in this synthesis remain distinct from claims made in the sources. Figure 1 shows how these judgments relate. It is an explanatory map, not a validated model.

The questions used to appraise evidence depend on the claim. Judgments of a product require attention to task conditions and criteria. Claims about development need grounds for interpreting change, and causal claims must address alternative explanations. Conceptual arguments depend on defensible premises and connections. Relational judgments require attention to whose experience and authority inform them. Before treating findings as conflicting evidence of effectiveness, it is

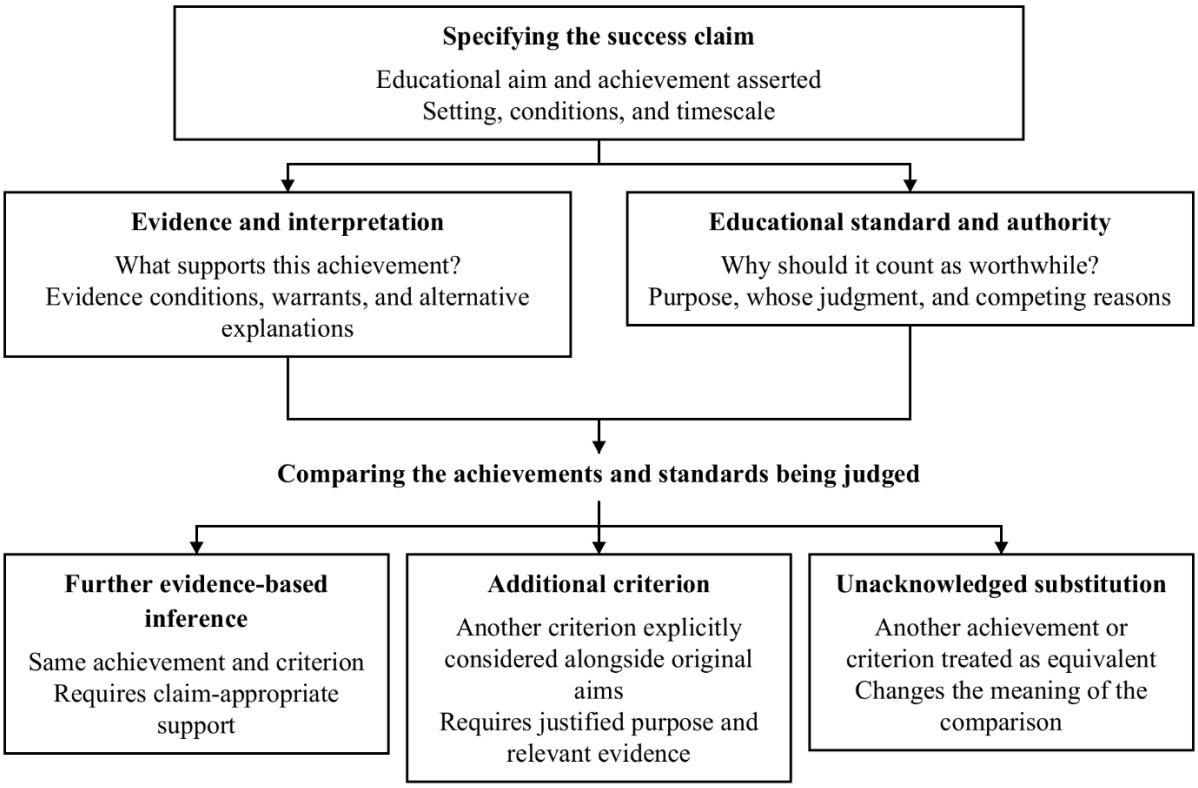
necessary to check for differences in achievement, context, time, and interpretation. Consistency lies in this reasoning, rather than in identical methods or a numerical quality score.

Table 2. *Analytical Dimensions and Research Questions*

Dimension	Questions guiding comparison	Interpretive focus
Educational aims (RQ1)	What achievement is intended, for whom, and in which setting? Why is it worthwhile?	Purposes, meaning, and context
Evaluation of achievement (RQ2)	What assessment or justification is proposed or used? What does it support?	Evidence conditions, warrants, assumptions, and alternatives
Comparison of success claims (RQ3)	Does comparison extend support for the same claim, add a justified criterion, or silently substitute another judgment?	Relationships among achievement, purpose, and authority

Note. The dimensions draw on argument-based evaluation, educational-purpose reasoning, and assessment validation (Biesta, 2009; Gruba et al., 2016; Kane, 2013).

Figure 1. *Conceptual Relationships in Evaluating and Comparing Success Claims*



Note. The figure integrates evaluation, purpose, and validation perspectives (Biesta, 2009; Gruba et al., 2016; Kane, 2013). Arrows connect questions rather than causal effects or learning stages.

Interpretive Commitments

This synthesis assumes that claims of achievement should stay within the support available and that educational purposes need to be justified. These commitments make justification open to scrutiny, but the assumptions guiding this synthesis also remain open to criticism. Independent observation is not universally superior to experiential or reflexive accounts. Its relevance depends on the claim. Critiques of privileged knowledge and evaluative conventions also apply to the evaluative standards used in this synthesis (Meighan, 2023a; Shah, 2026). Interpretations by learners and communities, or defensible purposes missing from a focal account, may challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the comparison.

EDUCATIONAL AIMS, PRACTICES, AND ACHIEVEMENT EVIDENCE

The publications examine resources, learner experiences, performances, dispositions, and institutions. Their findings concern both educational provision and achievement. The comparison first examines the purposes pursued and the practices intended or reported to serve them. It then distinguishes proposed assessments and enacted practices from achievements supported by evaluation, including effects where these are claimed. The source-level matrix records the publication-specific evidence. These distinctions allow the analysis to recognise the value of design and practice accounts while examining what they establish about achievement.

Shared Aims and Different Achievements

Communication, ecological understanding, and ethical relationships recur across the approaches. Eco-ELT extends literary and ecocritical work into environmental research and praxis. TLS organises integration through identification, awareness raising, and integration (Maijala et al., 2024; Maijala, Kuusalu, et al., 2025; Saiful, 2020, 2023). LESD connects environmental literacy with complex SDG understanding, values, beliefs, and norms (VBN), reflection, and empowerment (Jodoin, 2020, 2022). TEE connects languages with knowledge co-creation, land, place, and community (Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025). These shared concerns do not make the intended achievements interchangeable.

Even the shared aim of communication covers different capacities. Environmental reading, vocabulary, and writing differ from lexicographic mediation, dialogue, or articulating complex sustainability problems (Broermann et al., 2025; Campoy-Cubillo, 2025; Hämäläinen, 2025; Kalsum et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025; Nadiyah et al., 2024; Saiful, 2024b). SDG-related proficiency and participation in self-access activities give the aim another meaning. Spanish tasks connect communication with critical discussion and community initiatives (Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023; Orsatti, 2026). Comparing achievement therefore requires more precision than simply identifying communication as a common aim.

Ethical purposes include connectedness, empathy, and relational valuation, as well as agency and critical sustainability literacy (Gericke, 2025; Kuusalu, 2025; Saiful, 2024a; Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025; Saiful & Yunianti, 2025). Locally and Islamically grounded environmental learning and students' experiences give further meaning to the relationship between sustainability and communication (Budiasih et al., 2026; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025; Rosadi et al., 2025). Epistemic reconstruction and reparative curricula raise questions about recognition and institutions (Shah,

2025, 2026). Environmental vocabulary and favourable responses to lessons each address only part of these educational purposes. Table 3 presents a summary of the comparison.

Table 3. *Educational Aims across Four Sustainability-Oriented Approaches*

Educational Aim	Eco-ELT	TLS	LESD	TEE
Communication	English language learning through environmental content	Communication through sustainability inquiry and dialogue	Language learning through sustainability issues	Communication across languages and knowledge traditions
Ecological understanding	Environmental awareness and understanding	Holistic understanding of complex sustainability issues	Environmental literacy and complex SDG understanding	Relationships among language, land, place, and community
Ethical and participatory aims	Connectedness, empathy, ethical regard for nature, and environmental praxis	Critical reflection, agency, and action orientation	Reflection on values, beliefs, and norms, alongside empowerment	Respectful knowledge co-creation and recognition of community knowledge
Sources	(Saiful, 2020, 2023; Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025; Saiful & Yunianti, 2025)	(Gericke, 2025; Maijala et al., 2024; Maijala, Kuusalu, et al., 2025)	(Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023; Jodoin, 2020, 2022)	(Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025; Shah, 2025, 2026)

Practices as Designs, Enactments, and Interpretations

Material development, inquiry, communicative products, reflection, and projects give practical form to sustainability aims. Eco-ELT resources and TLS materials specify intended integration, while learner accounts describe experiences with documentaries, digital products, and local inquiry across courses (Budiasih et al., 2026; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025; Nadiyah et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2026) (Table 4). These accounts concern design commitments or reported experiences. They do not describe an equivalent treatment across the approaches, even where activities share a name or format.

Table 4. *Evaluation of Achievement across the Four Approaches*

Analytical category	Eco-ELT	TLS	LESD	TEE
Proposed tools and criteria	Environmental and language criteria for tasks and materials	Reflective tasks, communicative products, and competence criteria	SCOPE principles, feedback, and demonstration of learning	Journals, video reflection, and self-assessment for knowledge co-creation
Evaluation material	Material appraisals, writing, disposition surveys, interviews, and institutional observation	Dictionary products, questionnaires, self-assessments, journals, and project photographs	Course marks, questionnaires, coded reflections, interviews, attendance, and feedback	Classroom accounts, reflective tools, scholarly dialogue, and critical autoethnography

Analytical category	Eco-ELT	TLS	LESD	TEE
Supported judgments	Material suitability, task performance, reported dispositions, and institutional enactment	Textual change, reported learning, and documented project activity	Mixed course and questionnaire findings, participation, and perceived value	Situated interpretations of knowledge exchange and conceptual reasons for reform
Limits of inference	No automatic inference from material approval or reported attitudes to learning gains or ecological effects	No automatic inference from framework use or coded reflection to transformation or causation	Changed tasks and limited proficiency evidence restrict developmental and causal claims	Educator interpretations and proposals do not establish shared authority or enacted reform
Sources	(Bulan et al., 2026; Nadiyah et al., 2024; Saiful, 2024a; Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025; Saiful & Yunianti, 2025)	(Broermann et al., 2025; Campoy-Cubillo, 2025; Hämäläinen, 2025; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025; Orsatti, 2026)	(Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023; Jodoin, 2020, 2022)	(Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025; Shah, 2025, 2026)

LESD practices include content and language integrated learning, problem-solving, presentations, and self-access reading and listening with VBN discussion (Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023; Jodoin, 2020). The later SCOPE principles emphasise student-centred learning, critical thinking, feedback, practice and demonstration, and educating others. They cannot be assigned retrospectively to an earlier course (Jodoin, 2022). Transepistemic practices include text analysis, blogs, journals, video reflection, and self-assessment. The institutional proposals concern changes at another scale (Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025; Shah, 2026). What was designed, what took place, and how it was interpreted require separate judgments.

Evidence of Educational Achievement

Resource appraisal asks whether materials are suitable and usable. Expert validation, pupil responses about practicality, and perceptions after use address material quality, engagement, and perceived access to environmental language (Kalsum et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025; Nadiyah et al., 2024; Saiful, 2024b). Development stages and pilot enactments also need to be distinguished from experimental comparisons (Budiasih et al., 2026). Not all findings are favourable. Materials from two schools had a sound general pedagogical structure but weak ecological and policy alignment. The study included neither classroom observation nor evidence of learner outcomes (Betonio et al., 2026). Material usability or structure alone cannot establish every intended learning benefit.

Needs, readiness, and institutional inquiries examine the conditions for implementation. These conditions include requirements for local content, teacher and learner preferences, and practical constraints. Favourable teacher beliefs can coexist with uneven reported integration, and neither establishes observed teaching quality or learner change (Bulan et al., 2024, 2025; Ismail et al., 2025; Muthend et al., 2025). Leadership, routines, and organisational vulnerabilities concern how institutions put Eco-ELT into practice, rather than learner transformation (Bulan et al., 2026). Their contribution is to explain conditions and tensions that measures of learner achievement alone would miss.

Performance and disposition findings answer different questions. Appraisal of descriptive writing examines linguistic characteristics and expressed nature empathy, while ecomusicology scales administered before and after teaching concern reported connectedness and interests (Saiful, 2024a; Saiful & Yunianti, 2025). Effect-size statistics cannot be read as percentage growth, so the direction of reported change is retained without repeating that conversion. A separate survey before, after, and one month after teaching traces reported relational valuation over that interval, without independently verifying behaviour, writing improvement, or causal effects (Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025).

Learner accounts describe perceived meaning and reported action. Six interviews document engagement alongside vocabulary difficulty, anxiety, and support needs, with accounts of habits and campaign involvement that go beyond intentions (Putri et al., 2026). These are participants' accounts, without independent verification of behaviour or quantified ecological effects. How the accounts were elicited also matters. Some SDG-related comments followed an introduction of the concept during the interview (Putri et al., 2026). This condition qualifies broader interpretations of impact while leaving the experiential value of the accounts intact.

Communicative artifacts allow some achievements to be examined directly. Initial definitions, forum contributions, and final dictionary entries show variable textual and conceptual changes among twenty English Studies students. However, the final task allowed resources unavailable initially, and a modified definition was not necessarily an improvement (Campoy-Cubillo, 2025). Selected Spanish journal excerpts, translated reflections, student materials, and campus-project photographs support expressed understanding, narrated habits, and documented enactment (Orsatti, 2026). Neither account alone establishes transferable proficiency gain or environmental consequences. The Spanish account also leaves cohort size, excerpt selection, and longitudinal outcomes insufficiently documented. Its proposed adaptations need to be distinguished from activities that took place.

Evaluations based on reflection show both what learners report and the conditions affecting those reports. Ninety-four self-assessments from a dialogue course articulate communication, participation, and cultural perspectives. They also justify course completion, so favourable responding, the conditions of public posts, and the teacher-researcher role matter to their interpretation (Hämäläinen, 2025). Fifteen complete responses to a Swedish case-study task indicate greater awareness of complexity alongside limited deeper reflection and little reported change in overall sustainability understanding (Broermann et al., 2025). Another application interprets seventeen post-course accounts through competency categories (Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025). Coding an account as competence does not independently demonstrate that capacity.

LESD evaluations combine course performance, questionnaires, and qualitative accounts, with mixed findings. Higher marks in a later cohort coincide with changed assessment formats. Questionnaire comparisons are nonsignificant, while increased VBN-code occurrences and selected interviews inform an interpretation of deeper environmental literacy (Jodoin, 2020). The questionnaire includes self-reported behaviour, but concern, code counts, and verified action remain distinct. In self-access provision, attendance and favourable feedback support participation and perceived value alongside limited repeat attendance and mixed VBN engagement; proficiency was

not conclusively measured (Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023). Attendance and proposals for future feedback cannot establish increased learning-centre time or durable language development.

Situated knowledge work and institutional critique call for different judgments. Plant knowledge, place names, and metaphors inform an educator's interpretation of non-hierarchical co-creation, without participant-level evidence establishing everyone's experience of authority (Meighan, 2023a,). Scholarly dialogue and critical autoethnography develop conceptual reasons for epistemic reconstruction and reform through professional experience and curriculum examples (Shah, 2025, 2026). Recommendations for institutional change do not establish that change has occurred. Table 5 summarises these differences in support and scope without ranking research genres.

Table 5. *Evidence and Limits of Achievement Claims*

Approach	Conceptual or design grounds	Evidence in selected publications	Supported claims and limits
Eco-ELT	Environmental rationales and criteria for materials and tasks	Accounts of needs and readiness, appraisals, writing, disposition surveys, interviews, and institutional observation	Resource adequacy, performances, reported dispositions, and institutional enactment require different judgments
TLS	Didactic reasoning, task design, competency categories, and reflection	Lexical products, questionnaires, journals, project photographs, and prospective or retrospective framework use	Textual work, reported learning, and enactment differ from transfer, durable change, ecological effects, and attribution
LESD	Environmental literacy, SCOPE, and activity design	Marks, surveys, coded reflections, interviews, attendance, and feedback	Mixed findings and perceived value do not establish every language or sustainability aim
TEE	Co-creation, reflexivity, and institutional critique	Classroom descriptions, reflective tools, dialogue, and autoethnography	Situated interpretation and reasons for reform differ from established redistribution of authority or enacted reform

Note. Adequacy depends on the claim. An unestablished effect is not evidence that it did not occur.

COMPARING SUCCESS CLAIMS

When success claims are compared, the achievement being evaluated can change. Reflection may serve different purposes, and different forms of evidence may address related questions. A shared method or approach label therefore gives insufficient grounds for assuming equivalence. Comparison needs to examine how achievement, support, and evaluative standard relate. The following five contrasts examine language products, framework use, participation, behavioural criteria, and epistemic authority to show where further evidence is needed and where the comparison introduces another educational judgment.

Areas of Defensible Comparison

Educational aims can be compared by examining their emphases and overlaps. Practices can be compared through how they are intended or reported to serve those aims (Table 6). The evidence allows judgments about what particular findings support, but it provides no basis for a common effectiveness ranking. Conceptual arguments, accounts of practice, and demonstrated effects each contribute something different. The current study therefore also concerns similarities and differences in these judgments and the justification needed to interpret them further, rather than a score for each approach (Biesta, 2009; Gruba et al., 2016).

Table 6. *Qualitative Areas of Comparison*

Area	Defensible comparison	Required justification
Educational aims	Emphases, overlaps, and differences in communication, understanding, judgment, action, and recognition	Meaning and educational importance of the achievement
Educational practices	Relationships between proposed or enacted practices and educational aims	Setting, task conditions, and framework timing
Achievement evidence	Support provided by findings or arguments, including effects where claimed	Evidence conditions, inference, scope, and authority

Note. These areas organise qualitative reasoning rather than numerical ratings.

Language Products and Development

The same artifact can be assessed against different criteria. In descriptive writing, expressed perspective-taking and grammatical accuracy are assessed separately, with nine of eighteen texts meeting the reported accuracy criterion (Saiful & Yunianti, 2025). The task explicitly prompts the perspective of a suffering or abandoned being. Expressing that perspective is an achievement under those task conditions. It does not independently establish an unprompted, durable disposition. Similarly, the quality of a completed task does not show improvement from an earlier state (Kane, 2013). These limits concern what can be inferred from the evidence, rather than the educational value of the task.

Comparison of writing and dictionary work clarifies the different demands of developmental claims. Initial and final dictionary products make change visible, although unequal access to resources limits interpretation as unaided, transferable gain (Campoy-Cubillo, 2025). The writing appraisal lacks a baseline, whereas the dictionary comparison changes task resources. Each therefore needs different grounds for a claim of improvement. The persistence of reported relational valuation over one month concerns continuity in a specified disposition, rather than writing improvement or ecological action (Saiful & Ver Steeg, 2025). Comparison can connect these accounts while preserving their different achievements and time frames.

Framework Use and Attribution

Using a framework to design practice differs from using it later to interpret practice. Explicit TLS-informed task and material design can be compared with a later analysis of an earlier dialogue course, but neither use alone shows that the framework caused the achievement (Campoy-Cubillo, 2025; Hämäläinen, 2025; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025). Later TLS framing of a 2022 Spanish course leaves its original design lineage unresolved. The Swedish application names TLS practice without operationalising every model component (Broermann et al., 2025; Orsatti, 2026). These are substantive uses of the framework, yet they remain different intervention designs.

Knowing when a framework was used does not settle what its evaluation supports. Perceived communication, accounts coded as competence, and limited deeper reflection allow particular judgments, without independently demonstrating capacity or transformation (Broermann et al., 2025; Hämäläinen, 2025; Maijala, Patzelt, et al., 2025). The comparison must separate the role of the framework in practice, the achievement supported by the evidence, and attribution of that achievement. Developmental and causal claims require a further argument that a theoretical label or coding category cannot supply (Gruba et al., 2016; Kane, 2013).

Participation and Action

Attendance, narrated habits, and photographed projects document different forms of participation. Related research on English as a foreign language (EFL) distinguishes frequent presence in a learning space from reported control over learning there (Dang & Le, 2022). Comparison can recognise what was provided, how participants understood their involvement, and what took place, while keeping these achievements distinct (Griffiths & Jodoin, 2023; Orsatti, 2026; Putri et al., 2026). Photographs may establish placement or occurrence, while participant accounts explain experienced meaning. Neither is universally stronger. Increased participation, proficiency, sustained action, and ecological consequences each need support suited to the claim.

Reflection also supports different educational purposes. VBN-related environmental literacy, course self-assessment, and knowledge co-creation associate reflective practice with different achievements (Hämäläinen, 2025; Jodoin, 2020; Meighan, 2023a, 2023b, 2025). The conditions under which a reflection is produced, including its role in assessment, affect what can be inferred from it. Reflective accounts can therefore be discussed together without being treated as a uniform measure. A defensible comparison preserves the judgment supported by each account and identifies the point at which a further inference would be needed.

Justifying a Common Criterion

Aspiring towards environmental action and prescribing it pose different educational questions (Jodoin, 2022). Following up behaviour may clarify consequences, but it cannot by itself justify making conformity the defining achievement. Action competence, subjectification, and critical sustainability literacy give reasons to value independent judgment alongside action (Gericke, 2025; Jensen & Schnack, 1997; Kuusalu, 2025; Mogensen & Schnack, 2010). Action remains relevant, and existing purposes remain open to criticism. The standard used in comparison needs an educational defence, rather than selection simply because it can be measured.

A common criterion may still be justified. For example, courses with different primary aims might also be compared for their contribution to environmental action. This supplementary question can sit alongside their original achievements if its decision context, educational relevance, and evidence are explicit. Equating action with reflective judgment, or treating the absence of action as negating every other achievement, changes the meaning of the comparison. The relevance and authority of an additional purpose therefore need to be justified. Difference from the stated course aims is not, by itself, a reason to accept or reject it (Biesta, 2009; House & Howe, 2000).

Recognition and Institutional Change

Judgments of knowledge co-creation and institutional reform depend in part on whose experience counts. An enacted mini-unit and an educator's interpretation of knowledge exchange differ from a situated account of professional formation and reasons for reparative change (Meighan, 2023a; Shah, 2026). Allowing diverse expression, influencing what receives recognition, and implementing remedies are separate achievements. Critiques of privileged knowledge and technology already address evaluative authority in the focal scholarship. This synthesis examines the evidence supporting particular judgments and the scope of those judgments, rather than introduces that concern (Meighan, 2023a; Shah, 2026).

A task may prompt questions about its own standard. Questioning positive terminology allows one participant to challenge a dictionary task, without establishing a community-wide judgment (Campoy-Cubillo, 2025). Access, recognition, epistemic authority, and social learning provide further ways to interpret such questions (Barrett et al., 2025; Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele, 2023). A review of multicultural-education framings also distinguishes representation from influence over knowledge and decisions. It treats equitable participation as a normative principle, not a demonstrated outcome (Dang, Elnaili, et al., 2026). These resources do not establish reciprocal recognition in the focal practices, and the evaluative criteria used in this synthesis remain open to challenge. Reflexive inquiry or community deliberation may appropriately support relational claims. Adequacy should not depend on resemblance to a proficiency test or a universal positivist standard (Shah, 2026).

The Conceptual Contribution

Three distinctions clarify what a comparative judgment needs to defend. Evidence-based extension retains the achievement and evaluative standard while examining further support for the claim. An additional criterion asks another educational question alongside the original aims and requires relevant reasons and evidence. Unacknowledged substitution treats a different achievement or standard as equivalent, thereby changing what success means. Table 7 relates these distinctions to the worked comparisons. Making evidence and purposes explicit allows both to be criticised; it does not establish that either is adequate.

Table 7. *Worked Comparisons and Their Conceptual Results*

Comparison	Supported finding or conceptual argument	Further justification
Eco-ELT writing and TLS dictionary work	Product appraisals under specified conditions	Improvement, transfer, or durable disposition beyond the task
Framework use within TLS	Prospective design or later interpretation	Design lineage, achievement, and attribution treated separately
Participation and action across approaches	Attendance, narrated involvement, and documented enactment	Increased participation, learning, sustained action, or ecological consequences
A common behavioural criterion	Connections among understanding, judgment, and action	Relevance of an additional criterion without silently replacing original aims
Transepistemic classroom and institutional accounts	Situated knowledge work and reasons for reform	Authority, participant influence, and implemented change

Note. The further judgments are analytical questions, not claims attributed to every source or a hierarchy of methods.

The contribution explains how comparison can proceed when educational judgments differ. Existing mappings document variation in pedagogy and outcomes, while adjacent decolonial, multicultural, and textbook scholarship already examines educational legitimacy, participation, and reparative purposes (Al-Hakimi & Widyaningrum, 2026; Dang, Elnaili, et al., 2026; Shah et al., 2025; Sun & Li, 2026). The comparisons developed here show why seeking further evidence and introducing another purpose require different arguments. Respecting the purposes of an approach leaves them open to external criticism, but a defensible alternative must keep the original achievement visible. This allows evaluation without either erasing differences through uniform indicators or treating differences as a reason to abandon comparison.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The distinction between evidence-based and educational justification has implications for research reporting, teaching, and programme decisions. It asks which judgment an assessment supports and why that judgment matters for a particular decision. The proposals below follow from the conceptual argument; their effects on outcomes have not been demonstrated. Their usefulness depends on the setting and available resources, as well as the possibility that participants will disagree about what has been achieved or why it should count as success.

Implications for Evaluation

Evaluation reports can state what is claimed to have been achieved, what supports the claim, and why the achievement is worthwhile. They can also distinguish the use of a framework for design from its use for interpretation (Gruba et al., 2016; Hämäläinen, 2025). Assessments based on self-perception, observation, and tests answer different questions. Combining them is useful when their contributions and disagreements can be explained (O'Flaherty & Liddy, 2018; Redman et al., 2021). Programme comparisons should justify any additional criterion and consider how learners or communities can challenge it. Democratic evaluation and critiques of dominant conventions support

such deliberation without prescribing a single instrument (House & Howe, 2000; Meighan, 2023a; Shah, 2026).

Implications for Teaching and Programme Decisions

An achievement can be worthwhile even when its reach is limited. A debate may develop judgment without requiring agreement, and communicative practice can merit use without demonstrating durable transformation. Choosing indicators is itself educational, since indicators can shape the priorities they describe (Dahler-Larsen, 2014; Norris, 2016). Further inquiry should be proportionate to the claim and the capacity available to investigate it (Gruba et al., 2016). Competing global benchmarks and local epistemic priorities are also evident in a conceptual analysis of internationalisation and decolonisation in Vietnamese English education (Dang, Nguyen, et al., 2026). Values-led and curriculum-led orientations in five teachers' narrative interviews explain approaches to sustainability integration, without establishing classroom effectiveness or learner achievement (Özcan & Gürsoy, 2026).

Limitations

Coverage, publication genres, and settings are uneven, which limits generalisation and makes it difficult to attribute every contrast to approach identity. Named practice without complete operationalisation of a model, unresolved framework chronology, and conceptual dialogue play different roles in the analysis. They are not equivalent intervention evidence (Broermann et al., 2025; Orsatti, 2026; Shah, 2025). Overlapping classroom illustrations and unresolved independence between the Aceh reports also limit claims of replication (Ismail et al., 2025; Meighan, 2023a, 2023b; Muthend et al., 2025). Reporting problems involving questionnaire units, denominators, and effect-size interpretation qualify particular inferences. Missing data have not been reconstructed.

The classifications used in secondary sources are not treated as common measures of achievement. The underlying Eco-ELT review corpus was not individually re-screened here, and another review includes theoretical studies and reviews despite describing screening for empirical data (Al-Hakimi & Widyaningrum, 2026; C. T. & N., 2025). These limitations restrict how findings can be reused and generalised. They do not invalidate conceptual scholarship or show that unmeasured achievements did not occur. The source-level matrix records the detailed qualifications. Alternative theoretical perspectives and participant interpretations may also challenge the evaluative commitments and comparative distinctions used in this synthesis.

Further Inquiry

Future research could trace how design commitments are put into practice and relate to later achievement, noting when a framework enters the process and whether achievements persist. Comparing evaluations that retain an original criterion with those that introduce another could show how stakeholders contest relevance and authority. This would help distinguish insufficient evidence for a shared achievement from disagreement about its educational worth. The practical effects and explanatory limits of the distinctions proposed here remain untested and need further conceptual and empirical examination.

CONCLUSION

The selected approaches pursue overlapping but distinct purposes in communication, understanding, judgment, action, and recognition, and use different forms of evaluation to judge their achievement. Comparing their success claims requires attention to the relationship among achievement, support, and educational standard. The contribution distinguishes extending evidence-based support, adding a justified criterion, and silently substituting another judgment. Further evidence alone cannot justify a new purpose, just as respect for an existing purpose cannot shield it from criticism. Defensible comparison therefore requires both evidence-based and educational justification, with room to challenge the standards adopted.

DECLARATION

Ethics Approval and Informed Consent

Ethics approval and informed consent were not applicable because this article is a conceptual study and involved no human participants or identifiable personal data.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

The sole author was responsible for the conceptualization, research design, analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work.

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