EKONOMIKAS UN KULTŪRAS AUGSTSKOLA

Sustainability Literacy Survey

Results 2026

Introduction

EKA University of Applied Sciences launched its annual sustainability literacy survey. It is organized mainly for students to explore knowledge, attitudes, and everyday behavior related to environmental sustainability. For the first time, the survey was conducted in October 2026.

To address emerging pedagogical needs in sustainability education, this investigation assesses respondents' literacy across key sustainability principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings investigate the evidence-based integration of sustainability frameworks into higher education curricula. Aligning with EKA's main areas of targeted research in Sustainable Development and Circular Economy and Future of Education and Competences, the study contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Quality Education (SDG 4), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17) by framing sustainability knowledge, ethical decision-making, and continuous learning as foundational drivers of continual transformation.



Fig. 1. EKA's main areas of research according to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The survey was available in Latvian and English, and 145 questionnaires were received; 141 were valid: 81 in Latvian and 64 in English. The survey was anonymous, and the results were analyzed in aggregate form.

The survey consisted of four question blocks, each containing up to ten questions. The environmental aspects assessed were sustainability knowledge, sustainability attitudes, and sustainability behavior. In the introduction, the study collected basic information, including respondents' characteristics and appropriate practical and educational background.

Respondents rated each target block question using a Likert scale: 1 — Strongly disagree; 2 — Disagree; 3 — Neutral; 4 — Agree; 5 — Strongly agree; or, in the introduction part: 1 (Not at all); 2 (To a small extent); 3 (To a moderate extent); 4 (To a large extent); 5 (Fully).

Results analysis

To analyze current sustainability literacy, the survey included students from different study courses, age groups, and education levels, and it was available to experienced EKA academic staff by interest. The survey included 70 women (50% of total respondents) and 65 men (46%). 6 other people did not mark this answer. Most respondents (76%, or 107 people)

were aged 20 to 29 years. Fig. 2 shows the distribution by study program. The most active students are engaged in Business, Management, and Economics study programs.

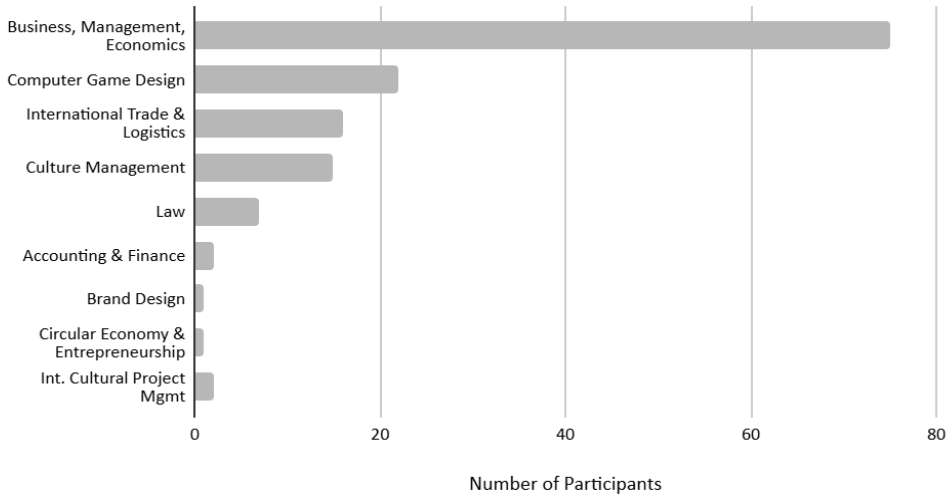

Fig.2. Respondent distribution by study program (by count)

In the introduction, the survey asked respondents to answer two main questions: 1) “To what extent has your previous or current education or training been related to environmental sustainability?” i.e., Education Relevance, and “To what extent has your previous or current employment been related to environmental sustainability?” i.e., Education Relevance.

Table 1. Demographic portrait of survey: sustainability concern by education and employment

Rating groups: 1 = Not at all to 5 = Fully. The table shows response counts, means, and percentage points.

Demographic Dimension	Categories	Sample Size (N)	Education Relevance (Edu), mean	Employment Relevance (Emp), mean	Relevance Gap (Edu - Emp)
Overall Benchmark	Total	141	2.96	2.85	+0.11
Gender	Woman	70	2.91	2.80	+0.11
Gender	Man	65	3.08	2.98	+0.09
Gender	Other / Prefer not to say	6	2.17	2.00	+0.17
Age Group	19 or less	15	3.20	3.27	-0.07
Age Group	20–29	107	2.87	2.76	+0.11
Age Group	30–39	14	3.36	3.07	+0.29
Age Group	40–49	4	3.50	3.50	0.00
Age Group	50 or more	1	1.00	1.00	0.00
Education Level	School education	97	2.82	2.73	+0.09
Education Level	Bachelor’s degree	31	3.23	3.13	+0.10
Education Level	Master’s degree	12	3.50	3.25	+0.25

Education Level	PhD	1	1.00	1.00	0.00

According to the above-represented statistics (Table 1), most respondents' education is not related to environmental sustainability. However, across nearly all segments, sustainability relevance in education exceeds employment ratings: there is an inconsiderable overall gap of +0.11. Relevance peaks among older career representatives (30–39 at 3.36, 40–49 at 3.50), while the 20–29 majority responses averaged 2.87. Male respondents reported slightly higher relevance in both characteristics (3.08 for educational profile/ 2.98 for employment background) than female respondents (2.91 for educational profile / 2.80 for employment background). Therefore, the main determining factors in educational and professional background are education and age.

Table 2. Education focus responses classification: sustainability concern by education and employment

Rating groups: 1 = Not at all to 5 = Fully. The table shows response counts, means, and percentages.

Education Level	Age Group	Sample Size (N)	Education Relevance (Edu), mean	Employment Relevance (Emp), mean	High Relevance Share %
School education	19 or less	13	3.00	3.08	30.8%
School education	20–29	77	2.74	2.65	19.5%
School education	30–39	6	3.33	3.00	50.0%
School education	40–49	1	4.00	3.00	100.0%
School education	**Subtotal**	**97**	**2.82**	**2.73**	**23.7%**
Bachelor’s degree	19 or less	2	4.50	4.50	100.0%
Bachelor’s degree	20–29	23	3.00	2.87	26.1%
Bachelor’s degree	30–39	4	3.50	3.25	50.0%
Bachelor’s degree	40–49	2	4.00	4.50	100.0%
Bachelor’s degree	**Subtotal**	**31**	**3.23**	**3.13**	**38.7%**
Master’s degree	20–29	7	3.86	3.57	57.1%
Master’s degree	30–39	4	3.25	3.00	50.0%
Master’s degree	40–49	1	2.00	2.00	0.0%
Master’s degree	**Subtotal**	**12**	**3.50**	**3.25**	**50.0%**
PhD	50 or more	1	1.00	1.00	0.0%
PhD	**Subtotal**	**1**	**1.00**	**1.00**	**0.0%**
Total	**All categories**	**141**	**2.96**	**2.85**	**29.1%**

High relevance share is the proportion of respondents who rated relevance to the sustainability issue as high (4 - To a large extent, or 5 - Fully). Ratings by educational level (Table 2) show that master's degree holders exhibit the highest engagement

(50.0% high relevance share), followed by Bachelor's (38.7%) and School education (23.7%). The survey PhD grade participant is not representative because it provided only one opinion.

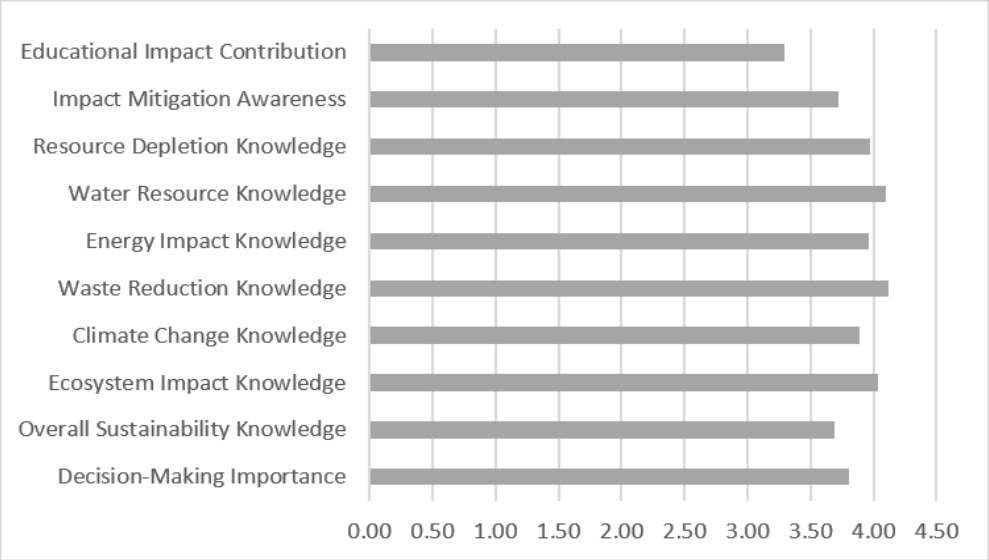

Fig. 3. Environmental sustainability knowledge of the respondents (frequencies)

As shown in Fig.3, most respondents rated their own environmental understanding across most areas quite highly, with Waste Reduction Knowledge and Water Resource Knowledge registering the top mean ratings (ca. 4.1). In contrast, Educational Impact Contribution scored notably lower (ca. 3.3), as it can be interpreted that previous education may not be effectively connected to practical sustainability awareness.

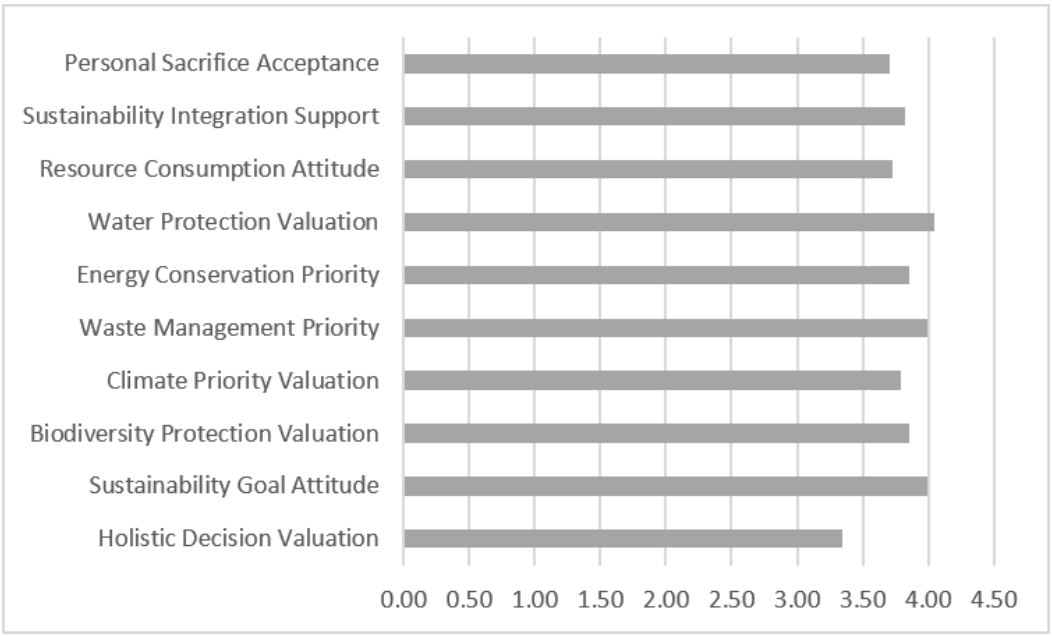

Fig. 4. Environmental sustainability attitudes of the respondents (frequencies)

The respondents showed strong support for the environment, with higher scores near 4.00 for protecting water, managing waste, and valuing sustainability goals. Attitude peaked at nearly 4.00. However, taking a holistic approach scored the lowest (ca. 3.35), reflecting that people often struggle to weigh environmental priorities against socioeconomic factors. The overall average score of 3.82 confirms a positive attitude toward sustainability.

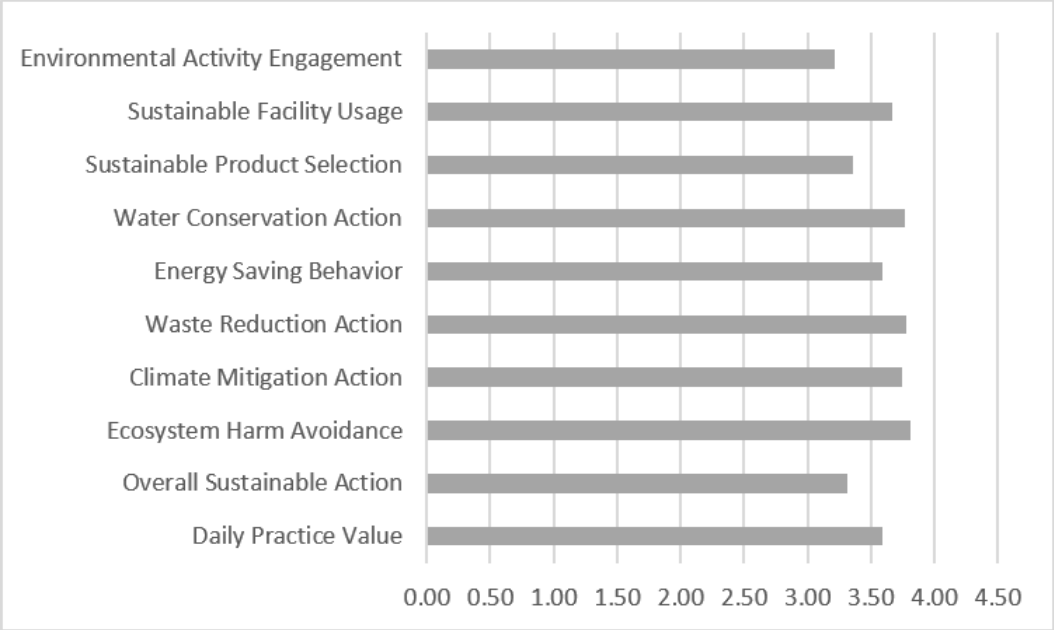

Fig. 5. Sustainability behavior of the respondents (frequencies)

While respondents reported staying consistent with easy everyday habits, like avoiding ecosystem harm and reducing waste (ca. 3.78), Fig.5 shows they are less involved in actions to resource-intensive commitments like buying sustainable products or joining environmental events (ca. 3.3). This discrepancy illustrates a classic "attitude-behavior gap," where reported willingness fails to translate into active participation or conscious decisions fully. Overall, Fig.5 shows people may claim to act more sustainably than they really do.

Given the discrepancies among knowledge, attitude, and everyday behavior, we analyzed the survey data by respondents' educational background and prior to sustainability training and awareness.

Table 3. Sustainability scores by completed education level (PhD response extracted)

Rating groups: 1 = Not at all to 5 = Fully. The table shows response counts and frequency means.

Education Level	**Respondents (N)**	**Knowledge, mean**	**Attitude, mean**	**Behavior, mean**
School education	97	3.87	3.82	3.49
Bachelor’s degree	31	3.90	3.79	3.83
Master’s degree	12	3.99	4.14	3.95
Overall Sample	**140**	**3.92**	**3.92**	**3.76**

Table 3 shows that sustainability scores generally increase with higher educational background, peaking among master's graduates in knowledge (3.99), attitude (4.14), and behavior (3.95). Across all groups, respondents demonstrated higher knowledge and more positive attitudes than actual sustainable behavior, pointing to the above-mentioned intent-action gap. School-educated survey participants, who made up the vast majority of our sample (97 persons in total), had the lowest score for everyday sustainable behaviors (3.49). Finally, a single isolated response from a PhD holder was excluded from this sample, as the response stated answers of score 1 (Not at all) to all questions and would impact the broader aggregate trend of this category analysis perspective, as it is seen in Table 4, where all valid answers are included.

Table 4. Sustainability scores by prior sustainability training

Rating groups: 1 = Not at all to 5 = Fully. The table shows response counts and frequency means.

Prior Training Level	Responses (N)	Knowledge, mean	Attitude, mean	Behavior, mean
Low (Scale 1-2)	41	3.60	3.53	3.21
Moderate (Scale 3)	59	3.76	3.78	3.63
High (Scale 4-5)	41	4.27	4.17	3.91
Overall Sample	**141**	**3.86**	**3.82**	**3.59**

As stated in Table 4, the respondents with high prior sustainability training scored substantially higher in knowledge (4.27 vs 3.60) and everyday behavior (3.91 vs 3.21) than those with low training.

Key findings

1. **The knowledge-to-action gap:** sample-wide environmental knowledge (3.86 out of 5.00) and positive attitudes (3.82 out of 5.00) exceed daily sustainable behavior (3.59 out of 5.00).
2. **Trends across educational levels**: sustainable practice adoption advances steadily with higher educational attainment from School Education (3.49 out of 5.00) to Bachelor's (3.83 out of 5.00) and Master's (3.95 out of 5.00)
3. **Prior education impact:** students with prior sustainability training showed noticeably greater environmental knowledge and put eco-friendly habits into practice more consistently than those with minimal or no appropriate education.

Survey outcomes summary

The findings highlight the need to embed sustainability directly into educational institutions' syllabi. By aligning with EKA University's focus on Sustainable Development and Circular Economy alongside the Future of Education and Competences, this research directly supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Ultimately, the study shows that developing environmental literacy, encouraging ethical choices, and promoting lifelong learning are essential strategic steps for long-term sustainable improvements.

Further research

Regularity of the survey: implementing the survey annually will enable ongoing analysis of how environmental knowledge, positive attitudes, and sustainable behavior change in the student community.

Long-term behavioral tracking: monitoring habits will reveal whether sustainability education creates lasting lifestyle habits or only temporary, short-term awareness. It could also strengthen respondents' sense of responsibility for sustainable behavior.

Expanding the survey sample: because the current study is short and in-depth, it could be expanded to a wider range of local universities, even across the Baltics, or to include academic staff to collect more accurate data by professional background and age. This could support new insights into study programs and implementation of a lifelong learning concept.

Data and methodology sources

EKA survey questionnaire: https://www.augstskola.lv/upload/Sustainability_Literacy_Survey_Questionnaire_Personal_Level.pdf