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Appreciating What Works, Imagining What Is Possible: An Appreciative Inquiry into SDG Integration in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how pre-service English teachers (PSETs) understand and envision integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into English language teaching (ELT) through Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Using a qualitative research design, the study involved ten PSETs from an English Language Education program at an Islamic higher education institution in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on the Discovery and Dream phases of AI and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that participants identified contextualization of English learning through real-world sustainability issues, meaningful and student-centered learning, awareness of social responsibility, and the use of technology and digital activities as key strengths in their existing practices. Building on these experiences, participants envisioned future ELT that is more authentic, communicative, inquiry-based, project-oriented, and multimodal. Their visions also reflected values such as responsibility, empathy, social and environmental awareness, cultural appreciation, and ethical citizenship. The study concludes that AI provides a strengths-based space for PSETs to connect successful teaching experiences with future pedagogical possibilities and emerging professional identities in ELT for sustainable development.

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1. Introduction

As sustainable development becomes more important, language teaching is moving beyond building language skills. English classes can help students explore social, environmental, cultural, and global issues while practicing real communication (Dhanyamol & Sethunarayanan, 2025; Cates, 2022). Instead of treating sustainability as just another topic,

teachers can use it as a real-world context for students to talk, solve problems, share ideas, and consider how to respond to challenges in their communities and beyond (Mambu, 2023; Saiful & Setyorini, 2023). To do this, PSETs need to plan lessons that can realize language goals into meaningful sustainability activities and encourage student participation.

Implementing sustainability in the classroom for PSETs requires more than familiarity with the SDGs. They need to identify real opportunities to connect language learning to students' lives, choose appropriate teaching methods, create interactive activities, and show how English can help students engage with real-world issues (Nahdi et al., 2024). Research on interactive language learning highlights the importance of student participation, communication, motivation, and linking classroom lessons to real-life situations (Omar et al., 2020). This means the main challenge in sustainable English teaching is not just what content teachers use, but how they design lessons that connect language and sustainability in meaningful ways (Bayram & Canaran, 2026). PSETs play a key role here, since their developing teaching beliefs and experiences will shape how they bring sustainability into their future classrooms.

Teacher development can also build on teachers' positive experiences. Traditional professional development often highlights problems or gaps, while Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers a strengths-based alternative (Magzan et al., 2019). AI identifies what is working well, the conditions that support success, and opportunities that arise from envisioning a better future together (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Besides, AI supports the development of self-efficacy and positive beliefs in teaching practices, which are essential for new teachers entering diverse classrooms (Diseth, 2025). Through the process of 4-D cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) of AI, this approach can help prepare them to become better future teachers and make education more effective.

Within ELT, Lessard-Clouston (2020) specifically proposed Appreciative Inquiry as a positive approach to ELT and teacher education. He presents AI as an alternative to traditional problem-solving by emphasizing strengths, envisioning possibilities, implementing changes, and taking action. The 4-D cycle provides a structured process for building on past successes to pursue future opportunities in teaching. Applying AI in ELT helps teachers address challenges, identify effective practices, and develop innovative teaching strategies (Magzan et al., 2019). This approach is particularly valuable in sustainable ELT, encouraging teachers to move beyond learning about sustainability and consider how classrooms can support meaningful engagement with sustainability issues.

Research applying AI to ELT and teacher education provides a useful foundation for this study, although previous work has focused on different areas. Lessard-Clouston (2020) examined AI in ELT and teacher education by outlining its key principles and presenting three case studies in ESL/EFL contexts. This work demonstrates that positive inquiry helps teachers and learners identify their strengths and explore opportunities for improvement. More recently, Al-Nofaie & Alwerthan, (2024) investigated four language student teachers' perceptions of using artificial intelligence tools to design ELT lessons for microteaching. While both studies offer valuable insights into strengths-based teacher development, Al-Nofaie & Alwerthan (2024) focused on using AI tools in lesson design, whereas Lessard-Clouston (2020) offered a broader discussion of AI in ELT. However, neither study examined

how pre-service English teachers interpret their successful experiences integrating the SDGs into ELT or how these experiences shape their future teaching practices.

Although previous studies have made important contributions, they have not focused on how PSETs' successful experiences, their ideas for future teaching, and the values behind those ideas are connected in a single study. Research on SDG integration has explored teachers' motivation, sustainability instruction, and skill development, while Appreciative Inquiry in ELT has highlighted the benefits of reflecting on strengths and envisioning the future. However, these areas need more attention, especially how PSETs identify strengths in their successful experiences, build on those strengths when imagining future SDG-integrated ELT, and express the values behind their visions. This study aims to fill that gap by bringing these aspects together through the Discovery and Dream phases of Appreciative Inquiry. Instead of assuming that SDG integration or strengths-based teacher development has been ignored, it looks at how successful experiences, future teaching possibilities, and teacher values connect in PSETs' stories at an Islamic higher education institution in South Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Building on this research gap, the present study looks at how PSETs interpret their successful experiences and envision future practices for integrating the SDGs into English language teaching through the Discovery and Dream phases of Appreciative Inquiry. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. What successful experiences and strengths do pre-service English teachers identify in integrating SDGs into English language teaching?
2. How do pre-service English teachers envision integrating SDGs into English language teaching?
3. How do pre-service English teachers' values influence their views on integrating SDGs into English language teaching?

By bringing Appreciative Inquiry to the intersection of sustainability education, ELT, and teacher education, this study contributes a strengths-based perspective on PSETs' pedagogical development. Instead of viewing sustainability integration as a knowledge or competence gap, it examines how successful experiences can inform future teaching practices. The study also advances the use of Appreciative Inquiry in ELT by linking the identification of effective practices with the envisioning of new possibilities, while highlighting the values and emerging professional identities that shape PSETs' approaches to sustainability-focused language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integrating SDGs in ELT context

Aligning the SDGs into ELT shifts the focus from purely linguistic objectives to a wider educational framework. While ELT has traditionally emphasised language skills, it now also addresses global issues and develops 21st-century skills such as competence, perseverance, curiosity, and the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Kim et al., 2019; Siregar, 2020). English classrooms incorporate reading, discussion, media analysis, and project-based learning, which support the inclusion of sustainability themes (Kwee, 2021). The SDGs offer a global framework for fostering peace, prosperity, and environmental

responsibility (Misiaszek, 2022), involving 17 goals consist of: (1) No Poverty; (2) Zero Hunger; (3) Good Health and Well-Being; (4) Quality Education; (5) Gender Equality; (6) Clean Water and Sanitation; (7) Affordable and Clean Energy; (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth; (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; (10) Reduced Inequalities; (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production; (13) Climate Action; (14) Life Below Water; (15) Life on Land; (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; and (17) Partnerships for The Goals. Thus, conceptually, SDG integration in ELT involves using sustainability issues as meaningful contexts and purposes for language learning, while extending the educational goals of ELT toward awareness, participation, and responsible engagement.

From a pedagogical perspective, integrating SDGs into English lessons means more than just choosing a related topic. It requires linking sustainability content to language goals and using teaching methods that engage students with the issues. Kwee (2021) notes that effective implementation requires strong course-design skills, thoughtful teaching methods, and a good understanding of sustainability. Besides, Cordova (2024) also finds that taking concrete action, using interdisciplinary and contextual teaching, encouraging participation, and promoting personal responsibility are key parts of SDG integration in English and literature classes. Education research more broadly links SDG teaching to project-based, participatory, and interdisciplinary learning, since these methods help students develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. This study's framework views effective SDG integration as a teaching process in which teachers make sustainability part of learning to create active learning experiences that let students contextualise and engage with real-world issues.

The literature shows that making ELT more focused on the SDGs depends on teachers' skills and the conditions they work in. Kwee (2021) finds that teachers' beliefs, confidence, motivation, and institutional support affect their willingness and ability to include the SDGs in English lessons. Recent studies also show that both coursebooks and classroom practices shape how sustainability is taught and understood (Annamalai et al., 2025; Cahya et al., 2020; Javahery et al., 2025), while curriculum requirements and institutional rules can limit teachers' efforts to include sustainability consistently (Usman et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). This means integrating the SDGs is more than adding new topics to lessons. It requires teachers to make thoughtful decisions, understand their teaching context, and turn sustainability themes into meaningful language-learning activities. Overall, the literature forms the basis for this study's focus on three connected areas: using sustainability as meaningful content and context, using pedagogy to integrate it, and relying on teacher competence to turn SDG goals into effective ELT practice.

2.2 Appreciative Inquiry in ELT

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach that promotes positive change in educational settings, especially in preparing future educators (Lessard-Clouston, 2020). Rather than focusing on problems or deficiencies, AI encourages individuals to identify and build on their strengths and successful experiences, inspiring future educators to envision their teaching by leveraging their existing strengths and effective practices (Cooperrider et al., 2008). This strengths-based approach empowers PSETs to develop innovative strategies and meaningful improvements in classroom practice. Hammond (2013) also highlights that AI identifies what works well and explores ways to expand and sustain these successes. By reflecting on positive

experiences and achievements, AI helps PSETs build confidence, motivation, and a growth mindset, improving teaching effectiveness and fostering more engaging, supportive learning environments.

AI is usually implemented using either the 4-D or 5-D cycle, both of which offer a structured way to create positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). The 4-D cycle includes Discovery, where participants find existing strengths and successes; Dream, where they imagine future possibilities; Design, where they work together to develop plans; and Destiny, where they collaboratively develop strategies and plans. The 5-D cycle includes a Define stage to clarify the main topic before beginning the process. The main difference is that the 5-D cycle includes this extra Define stage. In this study, the researcher uses the 4-D cycle because the focus was already set before starting, so a separate Define stage is not needed. The 4-D model is also more practical for educational settings, as it lets participants move straight into identifying strengths, imagining possibilities, planning improvements, and taking action.

The theoretical foundation of AI is based on the idea that positive inquiry shapes how individuals understand current practices and envision future possibilities. Cooperrider et al. (2008) identify several key principles: constructionist, simultaneity, anticipatory, and positive. The constructionist principle emphasizes that language and social interaction shape reality, making dialogue essential to shared understanding. The simultaneity principle suggests that inquiry can initiate change because the questions people ask influence what they notice, discuss, and consider possible. The anticipatory principle further proposes that future images guide present actions, while the positive principle highlights the importance of hope, inspiration, and positive experiences in sustaining change. In ELT and teacher education, these principles frame AI as a reflective and dialogic process that helps future teachers identify effective practices, clarify their values, and explore new possibilities for professional development. Lessard-Clouston (2020) also shows that AI supports teacher education by guiding participants from recognizing strengths to designing preferred future practices.

2.3 Teacher values and professional identity in integrating SDGs into ELT

In English language education, teacher values can be reflected in the purposes teachers attach to language learning and in the pedagogical choices they make (Sari, 2026). Rather than viewing English as a subject for developing linguistic competence, sustainable teachers may see English as a means for learners to explore different perspectives, communicate about social and environmental concerns, and participate in an interconnected world (Sari et al., 2025). This broader orientation is closely related to professional identity, which concerns how teachers understand who they are, what they value, and what they consider important in their professional roles (Mambu, 2023; Murtiana, 2025). Professional identity is therefore not limited to a formal teaching role but is also expressed through teachers' pedagogical beliefs, relationships with learners, and aspirations for their students. Recent research on language teacher professional wellbeing, for example, shows that teachers' pedagogical beliefs and values can shape their decisions to develop authentic materials, adopt more democratic teaching approaches, and create learning environments that better reflect their educational principles (Yousefi & Hooper, 2026). In this sense, teachers' values provide an

orientation through which they interpret sustainability and translate it into specific educational purposes and classroom practices.

For pre-service English teachers, the connection between values and professional identity is critical, as their identities are still developing through study, teaching practice, reflection, and school experiences. A sustainable view of professional identity positions English teachers as more than language instructors; they also foster students' social awareness, ethical understanding, agency, and engagement with real-world issues. Research indicates that teacher values, professional identity, and teaching practice are interconnected (Husna et al., 2022). Values influence teachers' views on the purpose of education, shaping their professional identities and informing their teaching choices and definitions of effective teaching. This relationship aligns with AI, where the Dream phase encourages participants to envision the teacher they aspire to be and the educational goals they want to achieve. In this study, teacher values serve as guiding principles that shape PSETs' perspectives on teaching sustainability. This approach allows the study to examine both the classroom practices these teachers hope to implement and the type of teacher they aim to become, along with the educational goals that motivate them.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to explore how PSETs imagine bringing SDGs into English language teaching. AI was chosen because it focused on participants' successful experiences, strengths, aspirations, and values, rather than on identifying problems in their teaching. The research mainly drew on the Discovery and Dream phases of the AI 4-D cycle. In the Discovery phase, participants reflected on times when they felt they had successfully included SDGs in their English lessons. They discussed the teaching methods, strengths, and beliefs that helped make these experiences positive. In the Dream phase, participants imagined how they would like to include SDGs in their future teaching. Here, they described their ideal lesson plans, activities, and the values and beliefs behind their ideas.

The study moved from looking at *what works* to exploring *what is possible*. Instead of listing classroom activities, it examined how successful experiences shaped participants' ideas for future English teaching and how their values influenced them. This approach helped answer three main questions about participants' successful experiences and strengths, their visions for teaching English with SDGs, and the values shown in those visions.

3.2 Participants

The study involved ten PSETs enrolled in the English Language Education program at an Islamic higher education institution in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. They were in their fifth semester and had completed the Curriculum and Materials Development and Language Teaching Methodology courses. The researchers selected ten participants for this qualitative study because the research had a specific focus and required participants with relevant experience designing English lessons that incorporated the SDGs. Their prior exposure to sustainability and the SDGs was primarily embedded in their coursework, particularly through assignments requiring them to design lesson plans around sustainability issues. This

coursework-based preparation provided an initial foundation for exploring how sustainability themes could be meaningfully integrated into English language learning.

Participants were selected through purposive criterion sampling. To be included, they needed to have previously designed English lessons that addressed at least one SDG issue. This approach ensured participants could share experiences relevant to the study's focus on successful teaching and future classroom practices. Most of the experiences they discussed came from lesson-planning assignments in their English language teaching courses. Participants described how they designed lessons about sustainability, the teaching methods they used, what they saw as the strengths of their lessons, and the practices they hoped to use in the future. Since the study is based on participants' interview responses, the findings reflect their reported experiences and teaching perspectives, not direct measures of student learning. Then, to protect confidentiality, participants were identified as P1–P10 throughout the analysis.

3.3 Instrument

The main data-collection instrument was a semi-structured interview based on the Discovery and Dream phases of Appreciative Inquiry. The questions asked participants to reflect on their experiences and how they might incorporate the SDGs into English language teaching in the future. The first section focused on the Discovery phase and asked participants to share successful experiences, effective practices, personal strengths, and positive beliefs related to integrating SDGs into English language teaching. These questions looked at how participants linked sustainability issues with English learning, which teaching methods they used, what they saw as successful, and which teaching strengths they relied on. Then, the second section focused on the Dream phase and asked participants to imagine their ideal future teaching practices. They described how they would design English lessons that include sustainability issues, what kinds of learning activities they would like to use, and what type of English teacher they wanted to become. The interviews also explored the values and beliefs behind these ideas, including their thoughts on the wider purpose of English education.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Interview data were analyzed thematically using the Appreciative Inquiry framework. Interviews were transcribed, reviewed for familiarity, and coded according to participants' experiences, strengths, visions, and values. Codes were then organized into categories and developed into broader themes. The analysis focused on the Discovery and Dream phases of Appreciative Inquiry. Discovery data identified participants' successful experiences and pedagogical strengths in integrating SDGs into English language teaching. Dream data captured participants' envisioned teaching practices and learning activities. The analysis also explored the values and beliefs in participants' responses. The analysis compared themes across participants to identify common patterns, variations, and connections between past successes and future aspirations.

4. Results

The results are organized according to the three research questions and interpreted through the Discovery and Dream stages of Appreciative Inquiry. During the Discovery phase, the analysis focused on participants' successful experiences, positive beliefs, and existing strengths in teaching methodology. In the Dream phase, the findings illustrate how

participants envisioned desirable future practices and the values that gave these visions educational significance. Across the dataset, participants did not perceive SDG integration as an additional content area for English lessons. Instead, they framed sustainability issues as contexts that could make language more relevant, communicative, participatory, and socially meaningful.

4.1 Successful experiences and strengths of PSETs in integrating SDGs into ELT

The analysis of Discovery-phase interviews indicated that participants' perceptions of success were organized around three interconnected patterns: (1) contextualizing English through real-world sustainability issues; (2) creating meaningful and student-centered learning; and (3) developing 21st-century skills through digital learning activities. The following table gives an overview of the themes, the linked teaching features, and examples from participants mentioned in the findings.

Table 1: Summary of interconnected themes in Discovery-Phase

Discovery theme	Pedagogical focus	Description	Participants cited
Contextualizing English through real-world sustainability issues	Linking familiar sustainability concerns to language objectives and everyday experience.	Comparing water and soda; contrasting clean and polluted rivers; discussing healthy and unhealthy habits; writing descriptive texts about sustainable communities.	P1, P5, P6, P9
Creating meaningful and student-centered learning	Using interaction, inquiry, problem-solving, collaboration, and student-created products.	Pair/group discussion, inquiry and problem-based tasks, project work, and posters about health or food diversity.	P1, P3, P7, P9, P10
Developing 21st-century skills through digital learning activities	Using digital resources to support research, collaboration, presentation, and production.	Internet research, Padlet brainstorming, Canva posters/infographics, Microsoft Word tables, presentations, and online sharing.	P1, P4

4.1.1 Contextualizing English through real-world sustainability issues

A consistent feature of participants' successful experiences was their ability to connect English learning to issues relevant to students' daily lives. Rather than using unrelated topics, they incorporated areas such as health, nutrition, sanitation, polluted rivers, sustainable communities, and environmental issues as contexts for language practice. For example, P1 integrated SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by asking students to compare water and soda consumption, as he mentioned:

> *"I taught students question expression by comparing water and soda and using IBL and CLT as the teaching methods to encourage students' critical thinking and active communication among peers."*

Meanwhile, P5 used the contrast between clean and polluted rivers to introduce environmental awareness by telling students a story.

> *"I told a story that could make them think, namely a pleasant story and a not-so-pleasant story. It compared a clean river and a dirty river."*

Similarly, P6 designed communicative activities around healthy and unhealthy habits by connecting English learning with students' real life-experience while encouraging awareness of healthy and responsible lifestyles.

> *"My best experience was when I have to designed an English lesson that integrated SDG 3 through a CLT approach. The lesson focused on good and bad habits, where students would work in pairs and groups to discuss their daily routines, share opinions, and give suggestions to one another."*

Whereas P9 used SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) to teach descriptive texts about ideal living environments using Genre Based Approach (GBA), as follows:

> *"Through the stages of GBA, starting from building knowledge of the field, analyzing model texts, and finally creating their own texts, students not only learned English structures and vocabulary but also developed an understanding of the importance of creating safe, clean, and community-friendly environment."*

In the interview results, participants' reflections were stronger when they connected English learning to sustainability issues students already knew and cared about. Instead of adding SDGs as extra material, participants used everyday topics like healthy habits, water use, river pollution, and sustainable communities to give students real reasons to use English. In these examples, sustainability topics gave students practical situations to practice language by asking questions, having discussions, describing things, and making suggestions. This suggests that students found English learning more meaningful and engaging when the topics felt relevant.

The examples also show that making lessons relevant went beyond choosing an SDG-related topic. Participants linked sustainability issues to specific language goals and teaching methods, such as Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), CLT, and GBA. By doing so, they made sustainability part of the language-learning process, helping students build language skills while thinking about real-life issues. These experiences suggest that the real value of including the SDGs lies in connecting language learning to real-world meaning, so English becomes a tool for understanding and discussing topics that matter to students.

4.1.2 Creating meaningful and student-centered learning

A second pattern involved the use of student-centered pedagogical approaches to create meaningful learning experiences. Participants reported using IBL, CLT, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), and GBA. For example, P1 implemented IBL and CLT to encourage critical thinking and peer interaction. P3 applied PBL to address food security issues related to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), while P4 used PjBL to examine SDG 15 (Life on Land). P9 employed the GBA to help students understand and produce descriptive texts about sustainable communities.

P3 summarized the perceived value of this shift by noting that students were not only learning English but were also thinking about a real problem.

"Students not only learning English, but they also thinking about a real problem.

In line with the previous statement, P10 also stated that language ability is not only about understanding sentence structures or memorizing words, but also about how students can express opinions, discuss ideas, and respond to real issues around them. Moreover, they not only improve their English skills but also develop awareness of global issues. For example, through Good Health and Well-being, students can understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Through environmental topics, they can learn about the importance of protecting the earth. Through gender equality, they can also better understand fairness and equal rights.

> *"I find this approach helpful because it focuses on student interaction and communication. In the classroom, students are not only receiving material, but they are also given many opportunities to speak, discuss, and use English directly."*

Another activity shows how participants designed student-centred learning by having students make posters about health and food diversity. According to P7, instead of focusing only on grammar and vocabulary, the activity let students use English to explore topics from their daily lives. Students took an active role, creating a useful project while learning more about health and environmental issues. This experience highlights how the participants linked language learning with real-world topics and student involvement, making English lessons more relevant and meaningful.

> *"By guiding students to make posters about health or food diversification, students not only learn English through grammar and vocabulary, but also learn English while building their awareness about their environment."*

In sum, the findings indicate that participants' successful integration of SDGs into ELT was closely linked to their capacity to design active, meaningful, and student-centred learning experiences. By implementing the instructional approaches mentioned, participants shifted away from teacher-centred instruction and facilitated opportunities for students to communicate, collaborate, solve problems, and produce meaningful outcomes. These activities enabled students to use English in real-world contexts, including health, food security, environmental protection, and social equality. Consequently, participants viewed effective SDG integration not merely as teaching English alongside sustainability topics, but as using sustainability issues to make language learning more purposeful while also fostering students' awareness, critical thinking, communication skills, and active engagement.

4.1.3 Developing 21st-century skills through digital learning activities

This section describes how participants enhanced students' 21st-century skills through interactive, technology-supported learning activities. Participants consistently incorporated digital tools, collaborative tasks, presentations, and project-based outputs into their lesson designs. P4 offered the most comprehensive example by integrating Padlet, Canva, internet resources, smartphones, and social media into a project centered on SDG 15. In this project, students collaborated to investigate environmental issues, create digital posters, and publish their work online.

> *"In terms of pedagogical approach, I used Project-Based Learning, in which students discussed life-on-land issues in groups, searched for information on the internet, and then carried out brainstorming using Padlet. The results of that brainstorming were*

then developed into a case presented as a simple poster or infographic on Canva, which they finally uploaded to social media as the final product of their written work."

Likewise, P1 required students to use Microsoft Word and Canva to produce comparison tables and present their findings to the class as he mentioned:

"*I assigned students to create a simple comparation table using Microsoft Word and Canva about the learning material and asked some of them to present their work in front of the class which then I rewarded them with some snacks."*

Several participants also highlighted communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy as important outcomes of their lessons. Through discussions, presentations, problem-solving tasks, and project work, students were encouraged to use English actively while developing broader competencies required for the 21st century. Through these experiences, participants perceived technology-enhanced and project-based activities as effective strategies for integrating language learning with sustainability education in meaningful and engaging ways.

4.2. PSETs' envision in integrating SDGs into ELT

During the Dream phase, participants expanded established contextualization practices into more detailed lesson scenarios. The proposed topics remained relevant to learners' experiences while addressing broader sustainability issues, such as teenage sleep habits (P3, SDG 3), fashion overconsumption (P8, SDG 12), water pollution and ocean conservation (P4, SDGs 6 and 14), and local legends as cultural heritage (P9, SDG 11). These selections reflect a comprehensive vision of sustainability that incorporates health, environmental protection, consumption, and community culture as summarized in Table 2. Importantly, these are proposed activities, not evidence that the envisioned lessons were implemented.

Table 2. Summary of PSETs' envision in integrating SDGs into ELT practices

Envisioned pattern	Participant cited and SDGs focus	Proposed activities	Intended learning purpose
Authentic sustainability contexts	P3 (SDG 3); P8 (SDG 12); P4 (SDGs 6 and 14); P9 (SDG 11)	Explore sleep habits, fashion overconsumption, water pollution, ocean conservation, or local legends.	Connect language learning with familiar and meaningful social, environmental, and cultural issues.
Communication, inquiry, and reasoning	P2 (SDG 14); P1 (SDG 15); P8 (SDG 12)	Watch videos, identify expressions, discuss solutions, summarize peers' ideas, debate, develop arguments, and propose alternatives.	Provide purposeful listening and speaking practice while encouraging explanation, critical thinking, and problem-solving.
Multimodal and product-oriented learning	P3; P7; P8; P9	Create podcasts, wall magazines, posters, gallery-walk displays, and digital stories.	Offer varied ways to compose, present, share ideas, and connect language use with sustainability or cultural appreciation.

The imagined classroom was active and communicative. P2 outlined a listening and speaking sequence in which students watch a video related to SDG 14, identify expressions, brainstorm solutions in groups, present ideas, restate another group's presentation, and reflect.

> *"I would design listening and speaking lessons based on SDG 14, which focuses on Life Below Water. First, students would watch a video related to SDG 14. While watching, they would identify and say the words and expressions they hear in the video. After that, they would work in groups to discuss possible solutions to the issues presented in the video. They would be allowed to brainstorm using their smartphones for around 10-15 minutes. Then, each group would present their ideas to the class. To strengthen their listening skills, each group would be asked to restate another group's presentation. For example, Group 1 would summarize Group 5's explanation, while Group 2 would summarize Group 1's explanation and so on. Finally, students would reflect on what they learned from both the topic and the learning activities."*

Likewise, P1 envisioned environmental debates supported by mini-research and argument preparation.

> *"I would design a speaking lesson based on SDG 15. Students would watch two videos regarding the importance of preserving forest and mountain. Then, I would divide students into two teams based on the theme videos and divide them again to work in pairs. They would create argumentative and persuasive points to why their chosen theme is far more beneficial in saving the world than the other team. Some students would be asked to volunteer to present their points to the class and the other team. The lesson would focus on speaking and critical thinking, and assessment would be based on their presentation and participation."*

Similarly, P8 would like to design a communicative classroom by discussing SDG 12, the causes and consequences of overconsumption and recommending alternatives.

> *"I would design a lesson based on SDG 12, particularly focusing on the issue of overconsumption in the fashion industry. Since many people tend to buy clothes simply because they are trending, I would show students images of textile waste and discuss its impact on the environment. Students would then work in groups to discuss the causes and effects of overconsumption, create posters encouraging responsible consumption, and present their solutions and suggestions in English. This activity would help students develop their speaking and critical thinking skills while raising awareness of sustainable consumption."*

Participants also imagined visible products and multimodal participation. P3 proposed healthy-lifestyle podcasts, P7 wall magazines and gallery walks, and P9 digital retellings of local legends. P9's idea integrated independent reading, digital summarizing, oral storytelling, and cultural appreciation. As P9 stated, *"Digital Storytelling encourages creativity and helps students understand that language can be used to preserve and promote cultural values while raising awareness about sustainability."* These proposals broadened the range of activities beyond spoken discussion, offering learners diverse opportunities to research, compose, present, and share ideas.

Through the findings in the Dream-phase, it can be concluded that PSETs view SDG integration as a contextualized, communicative, and action-oriented approach to English language teaching. They design lessons that transform familiar sustainability topics into active learning, where students investigate real-world issues, collaborate, share ideas, build arguments, and develop solutions in English. The use of debates, group discussions, projects, podcasts, wall magazines, and digital storytelling reflects a preference for multimodal, product-oriented learning, offering students varied opportunities to use and demonstrate their English skills. These approaches treat sustainability not as an extra topic, but as a meaningful context and purpose for language use, linking language development with critical thinking, environmental awareness, cultural appreciation, and responsible engagement with real-world issues.

4.3. Values as a lens for imagining English teaching

Participants' perspectives on English education reflected beliefs about its broader purpose. They connected language teaching to ethical responsibility, social and environmental awareness, respect for learners, and global engagement. P7 emphasized the goal for students to be "*not only good at English but also responsible, empathetic, and active in creating a sustainable future*."

Meanwhile, P4 rejected a limited instructional role: "*I do not see myself as merely teaching grammar and vocabulary, but as someone who helps shape how young people understand the world around them."* These statements indicate that participants viewed sustainability as integral to their teaching role, not just as lesson content.

A commitment to social responsibility guided the selection of topics such as bullying, healthy living, and environmental protection. These values have clear pedagogical implications. Commitment to learner agency was reflected in the use of discussion, choice, inquiry, and opportunities for students to express different perspectives. P5 highlighted this connection:

> "*The value that I will bring is being a teacher who adjusts to students' conditions so that there is no feeling of being forced to learn."*

In line with P5, P6 stated that teaching English also meant helping students "*understand different perspectives, reflect on global issues, and develop respect for people and the environment."* The interviews thus suggest a relationship between professed values and envisioned pedagogy, while not establishing a causal influence.

Local, cultural, and spiritual commitments contributed a unique perspective to these visions. P1 referenced *Insan Kamil* and *Khalifah* to describe holistic development and stewardship of the earth, as he mentioned "*students would understand that English language learning would help them grow holistically in objectives of education in general but also to be an individual and people that play the role Khalifah, which sees the world as a main concern and developing universal goals in order to keeping it sustainable."* Similarly, P5 suggested linking sustainability to Islamic values when relevant for Muslim learners. In addition, P9 linked preserving local legends to building sustainable communities. These examples illustrate how participants interpreted global goals through locally meaningful ethical and cultural perspectives. Some participants explicitly incorporated spiritual values into their teaching visions, whereas others did not.

Table 3. *Values expressed in participants' visions of integrating SDGs in ELT*

Value orientation	The evidence from participants' interviews	Connection to envisioned ELT
Ethical, social, and environmental responsibility	P7 described wanting students to become responsible and empathetic; P4 viewed teaching as helping learners understand the world. Participants also discussed bullying, health, and environmental protection.	Use English to explore real-world concerns and encourage responsible engagement, rather than limiting learning to grammar and vocabulary.
Care, respect, and learner agency	P5 emphasized adapting teaching to students' conditions; P6 highlighted understanding different perspectives and respecting people and the environment.	Provide supportive opportunities for discussion, inquiry, student choice, and expressing different perspectives.
Local, cultural, and spiritual values	P1 referred to Insan Kamil and Khalifah; P5 mentioned Islamic values; P9 connected local legends with cultural heritage.	Connect global sustainability issues with local cultural and ethical meanings. Spiritual framing was explicit in some accounts, not all participants.

Table 3 summarizes the values that participants mentioned and how these values connect to their ideas about English teaching. In the interviews, participants often focused on more than just language skills. They talked about ethical responsibility, social and environmental awareness, learner agency, empathy, and global engagement. For instance, P7 wanted students to become responsible and empathetic. P4 saw the teacher's job as helping learners understand the world, not just teaching grammar and vocabulary. P5 stressed the need to adapt teaching to students' situations, and P6 pointed out the importance of respecting different perspectives, people, and the environment. These examples show that participants' values match their teaching goals, but they do not prove that these values directly influenced their teaching decisions.

In conclusion, the findings show a pattern in which participants' reported strengths in contextualization, student-centered pedagogy, and technology-supported learning were reflected in their envisioned use of authentic issues, communicative inquiry, and multimodal products. Responsibility, empathy, respect, and locally meaningful cultural or spiritual perspectives appeared across these visions, although only some participants explicitly framed their teaching visions in spiritual terms.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that participants viewed SDG integration as more than simply adding sustainability topics to English lessons. They used real-world issues such as health, food choices, river pollution, and sustainable communities as contexts for inquiry, discussion, description, and solution-building in English. This perspective aligns with Cordova (2024), who identified contextualized and interdisciplinary teaching, student participation, and personal accountability as key aspects of SDG integration. However, Cordova's study also included classroom implementation and student feedback, while the present study is based on interviews with PSETs who designed the lessons which integrate with the SDGs. As a result, these findings reflect participants' interpretations and reports of successful

experiences, but do not independently demonstrate improvements in student engagement or language learning. Here, success refers to participants' evaluations of their experiences and lesson designs, not to measured learning outcomes.

Participants described how they integrate sustainability topics into English learning goals. They used methods like IBL, CLT, PBL, PjBL, and GBA. They also carried out activities such as making posters, giving presentations, and creating digital projects. These results match Saiful & Setyorini (2023), who found that an ecocriticism course helped pre-service English teachers learn more about teaching sustainability. Still, studies examining actual lesson plans show some gaps. Bayram & Canaran (2026) reviewed 27 lesson plans that included the SDGs and found that environmental issues, especially SDGs 13 and 12, were common, but SDGs 2, 4, and 15 were less often addressed. In this study, participants discussed a broader range of topics, including health, food security, environmental protection, responsible consumption, and cultural heritage. However, their interview answers alone do not show whether they covered the SDGs equally or whether the language goals, sustainability aims, activities, and assessment were well matched. So, while participants shared promising teaching ideas, more analysis of their lesson plans and classroom work is needed to judge the quality and real impact of their teaching.

Research shows that integrating SDGs takes more than just enthusiastic teachers. Kwee (2021) found that teachers' motivation and confidence depended on their beliefs, teaching backgrounds, and support from their schools. Cordova (2024) pointed out that creating lessons that integrate the SDGs can take significant time and effort. Other studies have highlighted problems with learning materials and curricula. For example, Annamalai et al. (2025) found that Malaysian English textbooks did not cover all SDGs and focused more on environmental goals. Javahery et al. (2025) reported that ELT coursebooks did not present environmental topics evenly, and teachers struggled with syllabus demands, exam-focused teaching, and institutional expectations. Usman et al. (2025) also found that SDG integration in Indonesian and Malaysian university EFL programs was limited and inconsistent, with varying levels of support across different campuses. These studies show that knowing effective teaching methods does not always mean SDGs are integrated consistently. Although participants saw strengths in their lesson planning, challenges with curriculum, materials, and institutional support may still remain.

The connection between the Discovery and Dream phases is a key finding of this study. Participants often built on strengths they had already noticed. For example, topics became more relevant to local and global issues, student-centered learning grew through inquiry and projects, and communication activities turned into debates, group discussions, and multimodal projects. This trend matches Lessard-Clouston (2020) view of AI as a way for ELT professionals to move from recognizing what works to imagining what could be better. Other research on AI and language teacher wellbeing also shows that reflective dialogue can help teachers express their professional values and ideas for the future (Yousefi & Hooper, 2026). However, since this study used interviews instead of a long-term intervention, the Discovery-to-Dream link should be seen as what participants described, not as proof that the Discovery phase led to their visions or that AI improved teaching skills.

The values that participants described in their visions are important for more than just being positive goals. They connected English teaching with responsibility, empathy, respect, care

for the environment, and, for some, Islamic ideas and local cultural traditions. This focus on the purpose of education is similar to what Mambu (2023) found in a case study, where working with the SDGs helped a pre-service English teacher think more critically and find a sense of purpose, including a drive for social change. However, Misiaszek (2022) suggests we should look at the SDGs more critically, questioning how development is defined and how power and social relationships are shown. This view warns us not to see the SDGs as neutral or to assume everyone shares the same values about sustainability. In this study, local, cultural, and spiritual views helped some participants make sense of global goals using their own ethical beliefs, though not everyone used a spiritual approach. Teacher education can encourage PSETs to connect the SDGs with local values and also to think critically about whose views are included, how sustainability is discussed, and how global goals fit with local social and environmental issues.

As a result, this study suggest that strengths-based reflection can help PSETs find meaningful ways to integrate the SDGs into English language teaching. However, it should not replace the need to evaluate teaching quality or classroom results. Unlike studies that used classroom observations and learner feedback (Cordova, 2024; Kwee, 2021) or analyzed lesson plans and curriculum documents (Bayram & Canaran, 2026; Usman et al., 2025), this study relies only on interview data. Its main value is interpretive, as it links participants' strengths, teaching ideas, and values in a single study. For teacher education, this means combining Appreciative Inquiry with opportunities to review lesson plans against clear language goals and sustainability skills, practice lessons through microteaching, get feedback, and reflect on how activities and assessments align. This support can preserve the motivational benefits of focusing on what PSETs already do well while also addressing gaps in SDG coverage, encouraging future-focused learning, and considering what it takes to put these ideas into practice.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that Appreciative Inquiry offers a meaningful, strengths-based approach to exploring how pre-service English teachers understand and envision SDG integration in ELT. The findings suggest that participants' successful experiences provided a foundation for imagining more contextualized, communicative, and action-oriented forms of English teaching. Broader educational values also shaped their visions, including responsibility, empathy, social and environmental awareness, and respect for local and cultural perspectives. Therefore, the study suggests that sustainability-oriented teacher education can benefit from starting with what future teachers already recognize as meaningful and effective, while creating space for them to envision how these strengths can inform future practice. In this way, Appreciative Inquiry offers a promising framework for connecting existing strengths, pedagogical possibilities, and emerging professional identities in preparing PSETs to integrate sustainability in ELT.

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