

Role of Education in Promoting Sustainable Fashion Awareness among Youth: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

Fashion, especially that based on current trends, plays a significant role in the lives of young people. Fast fashion has gained popularity amongst college students because it is cheap, easily accessible, and shaped by trends on social media. However, it has led to a number of problems, including pollution, textile waste, unfair labour conditions, and the excessive use of natural resources. Sustainable fashion has now emerged as a key method of tackling these problems and of promoting environmentally sound production and responsible consumption. Education is important if we are to encourage young people to adopt sustainable fashion, as it enables us to understand the negative effects of both fast fashion and trend-based fashion and thus encourages better choices when it comes to fashion. The aim of this paper is to examine the role of education in raising awareness of sustainable fashion and in getting students to make responsible choices. It also explains why schools and universities should include lessons on sustainability in order to foster responsible consumer behaviour. The study is based on information from books, articles and published research and makes use of secondary research, drawing on academic books, peer-reviewed articles and published studies to produce this conceptual review.

Keywords: Sustainable fashion, young people, education, fast fashion, environmental awareness, responsible consumption, lifestyle.

1. Introduction

Fashion plays a crucial role in the everyday lives of young people. At present, many young consumers engage with trend-driven fashion through social media, celebrities, influencers, and online shopping sites. Fast-fashion companies frequently launch new styles at low prices in order to get young people to buy fashionable clothing more often.

Fast fashion produces clothes that are both fashionable and cheap, but it also contributes to serious environmental and social problems. For instance, it results in a substantial amount of textile waste and pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020, pp. 189-200). Though this study offers valuable evidence on environmental effects, it is primarily based on data from major production centres and may therefore not adequately capture variations among smaller producers or across geographic areas. The overuse of water, chemicals, and synthetic fabrics also does damage to the environment (Fletcher, 2014). Nevertheless, Fletcher's study concentrates on the resource aspect of production and gives little information about the consumer behaviours that cause these effects. Many garment workers also experience bad working conditions and are paid low wages (Moktan & Chakrabarti, 2024). Even though this research points out significant labour issues, its conclusions are limited because they depend on self-reported experiences,

which could either understate or overstate the working conditions. All of these sources together give a thorough yet at times narrowly focused account of the wide-ranging difficulties linked to fast fashion.

The importance of sustainable and eco-friendly fashion in tackling these issues has grown. Such an approach encourages the use of eco-friendly materials, ethical production methods, recycling, reuse, and responsible consumption. Since young people are among the main consumers, it is essential to increase their awareness. Education can enable young people to grasp the concepts of sustainability and environmental responsibility, and schools, colleges and universities can help students make responsible choices about fashion by means of awareness campaigns, lessons and practical hands-on activities.

The review looks at the role that education can play in helping young people to learn about sustainable fashion and proposes some ways in which schools and colleges could promote and encourage sustainable consumption.

2. The aims of the study

Given the increasing concern about the environment, it is essential to understand the role that education can play in shaping young people's attitudes and awareness regarding sustainable and eco-friendly fashion. Education promotes responsible consumption and helps people make environmentally friendly choices. The present paper looks at the meaning of sustainable fashion in today's world and investigates how education affects young people's awareness. Starting from these issues, the study has the following **objectives**:

1. The meaning of sustainable fashion and the reason for its importance in today's society.
2. To examine how education helps raise awareness of sustainable fashion among young people.
3. To explore the challenges faced in promoting sustainable fashion education among youth.
4. To suggest ways that can improve sustainable fashion awareness and encourage sustainable consumer behavior.

3. Literature Review:

In recent years there has been a substantial increase in research concerning sustainable fashion and clothing, with various studies having examined the subject from different angles. For example, certain studies have shown the impact of the fashion industry on the environment and on workers by investigating its production methods, supply chains, and working conditions. Other research has specifically looked at the importance of educating young people to make responsible choices about their clothing, usually looking at both formal and informal educational interventions. Furthermore, some studies look at how particular methods—such as lessons given in the classroom, organised awareness campaigns, or the role of social media—can influence young people's understanding and their acceptance of sustainable fashion practices. This review makes use of both international and local literature, with a special focus on studies that are relevant to our country in order to offer insights that are appropriate to the local situation. The studies listed below examine these diverse approaches and look at how educational initiatives have raised awareness about sustainable fashion among young people in our country.

4. Early Phase (2000–2010): Emergence of Ethical and Sustainable Fashion

Interest in sustainable fashion started to grow in the early 2000s as researchers pointed out the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry. At that time, studies focused on ethical fashion, fair trade, and responsible consumer behavior. Joergens (2006) found that even though consumers cared about ethics, their purchases were still mostly influenced by price, brand, and trends. The study also found a large gap between what people said, what they believed, and how they actually shopped. By the end of the decade, scholars stressed the need to educate consumers. The goal of this education was to encourage

responsible buying and reduce the negative effects of fast fashion. It was seen as an important way to promote awareness of environmental and ethical issues in clothing production and use.

5. Development Phase (2010–2015): Understanding Consumer Awareness

During this time, research looked at what prevents people, especially young people, from choosing sustainable fashion. Connell (2010) found that barriers included a lack of knowledge, limited access to sustainable products, higher prices, and low awareness. The study suggested that education programs could help by informing consumers about sustainable choices. At the same time, sustainability education became increasingly important worldwide. Schools and universities started to see their role in encouraging students to act responsibly toward the environment. Researchers said that adding sustainability topics to courses could help young people make more sustainable lifestyle choices.

Expansion Phase (2016–2020): Sustainable Fashion and Youth Engagement

Between 2016 and 2020, research grew significantly because of rising concerns about fast fashion's impact on the environment. Han and Stoel (2017) found that environmental attitudes, fashion awareness, and perceived consumer effectiveness strongly affected sustainable clothing purchases. This suggests that education and increased awareness are not isolated factors but interact to shape consumers' willingness to buy sustainable clothing. In contrast, a major review of sustainable fashion literature from 2000 onward demonstrated that scholarly focus expanded from viewing sustainable fashion primarily as an ethical issue to encompassing broader themes of environmental sustainability, consumer behavior, supply chains, and the role of education. While Han and Stoel's findings focus on individual psychological drivers of sustainable consumption, the review provides a broader, more structural perspective by highlighting shifts in research focus and the increasing recognition of education's institutional role. However, both sources identify education as a significant influence, whether directly on individual motivation or more broadly across institutional practices. Notably, as universities responded to these converging findings, they introduced sustainability-related courses, workshops, and awareness campaigns to foster responsible consumption and sustainable living among students. Comparing these studies shows that while individual attitudes are important, comprehensive educational strategies across institutions are also necessary to shape sustainable consumption habits.

Recent Phase (2021–2023): Education, Social Media, and Behavioral Change

Recent research has also focused on young adults, especially university students and Generation Y, because of their strong interest in fashion. Das et al. (2021) found that educational strategies can increase awareness and encourage sustainable practices among consumers. Their findings suggest that awareness campaigns, hands-on learning, and sustainability-focused training programs can inspire people to make more responsible buying decisions.

Similarly, a 25-year review by Dabas and Whang (2022) found that consumer knowledge and awareness are the strongest factors in choosing sustainable fashion. The review also said that education is a key reason why people choose to buy sustainable products.

Students are identified as having increasing concerns over ethical production and brand impacts due to the increase in awareness driven through media and peer interactions. Further, students are becoming more concerned about ethical production and the impact of brands due to greater awareness from the media and peers. Scholars also recognize that media, including campaigns, celebrities, and social influencers, play a big role in helping young people learn about sustainable fashion. A search in 2025 about Gen Z consumers pointed out that awareness regarding the environment is a determining factor in their personal norms and intention to exhibit sustainable fashion clothing behavior. The findings indicated that environmental awareness plays the role of a bridging function between personal environmental values and sustainable clothing-related actions.

The results demonstrated that increased awareness, such as through targeted educational campaigns and peer-driven discussions, can have a measurable positive effect on sustainable fashion education. For example, Das et al. (2021) reported that students exposed to structured sustainability programs were significantly more likely to adopt responsible fashion consumption habits. Similarly, Dabas and Whang (2022) identified consumer knowledge and awareness as key determinants in the adoption of sustainable fashion practices among young adults.

A 2025 academic publication confirmed that teaching sustainable fashion should include real-world experiences, virtual platforms, fashion shows, and multidisciplinary approaches to help students understand sustainability, not just theory. Other studies also show that human actions in fashion continue to cause major problems, so education is essential. Universities are encouraged to teach students about sustainable fashion through courses, programs, campaigns, and community involvement.

Research Gap

A look at the earlier studies showed that there are some areas which need more research; the main gaps are listed below.

1. The studies show that it is a good idea to teach young people about sustainable fashion, but they do not provide a definite answer as to which teaching method has the greatest effect on students at the present time.
2. What current studies indicate is that even among students who are well-informed, many are unable to go for sustainable fashion because of financial constraints, the lack of sustainable alternatives, and the fact that fast-fashion trends are popular among their peers.
3. A large number of institutions are employing courses, workshops, peer-led campaigns, and projects carried out on campus in order to promote sustainable fashion; yet it remains uncertain which of these methods is most effective at affecting people's buying behaviour.

6. Conceptual Framework

6.1 The Meaning of Sustainable Fashion and the Reason Why It Is Important

Sustainable fashion is really about the way in which clothes are made, purchased and got rid of since this should help to protect both the environment and the people who live on the planet; it is the exact opposite of the "take-make-waste" approach adopted by fast fashion. The two main principles lie at the heart of sustainable fashion:

- **You can help in protecting nature** by using less water, avoiding the use of toxic dyes, reducing carbon emissions, and making clothes that are durable rather than throwing them away after only a few washes ([Andreadakis & Owusu-Wiredu, 2023](#); [Bailey et al., 2022](#); [Wang et al., 2020](#)).
- **Protecting people** by making sure that garment workers (often young women in developing countries) work in safe buildings, are treated with respect, and earn a fair living wage ([Bennetta & Hill, 2022](#); [Schiaroli et al., 2024](#)).

6.2 Education as the Basis

This review considers education to be the primary means of raising awareness about sustainable fashion among young people. Through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, we examine this process. According to this theory, intentions are influenced by three factors: personal attitudes, social pressure, and a feeling of control ([Kang et al., 2013](#); [Kumar et al., 2022](#)). While education by itself will not alter the choices that students make about what to buy, it does affect all three of these factors. Students are more likely to select sustainable clothing when they think that doing so is important, when they see their friends and family supporting eco-friendly fashion, and when they feel that they can actually afford and access the products.

6.3 The Four-Stage Framework

The review proposes a four-stage framework that links education to long-term sustainable fashion behaviour among youth:

Stage 1: Educational Inputs

The following are both formal and informal learning activities which introduce young people to the concept of sustainability. They comprise:

- School and university curricula
- Sustainability-focused courses
- Workshops, seminars, and repair cafés
- Awareness campaigns on campus
- Social media and digital learning platforms
- Industry–academia collaborations

Stage 2: Knowledge Development

Through structured learning, students come to understand:

- Environmental issues linked to fashion
- Sustainable fashion practices
- Ethical production and fair wages
- The circular economy and symbol of reuse
- Textile waste and its consequences
- Responsible consumption habits

Research has shown that students begin to realise how their fashion choices affect the world around them when they acquire knowledge in these areas ([Dabas & Whang, 2022](#); [Kang et al., 2013](#); [Williams et al., 2025](#)).

Stage 3: Attitude Development

When students absorb the values of environmental care and ethical responsibility, knowledge turns into an attitude and they make the transition from 'knowing' to 'caring'. Positive attitudes cause them to back sustainable brands and take into account the broader effects of their purchasing decisions ([Kang et al., 2013](#); [Kumar et al., 2022](#); [Williams et al., 2025](#)).

Stage 4: Behaviour Change

Even if positive attitudes don't always result in action, they do represent a crucial first step. Broad research indicates that students who form strong positive attitudes towards sustainability are more likely to:

- Reuse and recycle clothing
- Buy fewer fast-fashion items
- Choose responsible brands when they can
- Repair garments instead of throwing them away ([Jestratićević et al., 2026](#); [Kang et al., 2013](#); [Maharani et al., 2025](#); [Portillo et al., 2025](#))

The framework suggests that education influences sustainable-fashion behaviour mainly by building knowledge and shaping positive attitudes. However, real-world barriers such as cost, trends, and social pressure often intervene between intention and action ([Cairns et al., 2021](#); [Schiarelli et al., 2024](#); [Teerakapibal & Schlegelmilch, 2024](#)).

7. Discussion

The review indicates that education can be an effective means of increasing young people's awareness of sustainable fashion, but it alone is not a complete solution. Educational programmes must do more than just provide facts; they should assist students in developing practical skills and promote continued

collaboration between schools, governments, fashion companies, non-profits, and the media ([Bennetta & Hill, 2022](#); [Mukendi et al., 2020](#); [Schiaroli et al., 2024](#)).

7.1 Why Education Matters

For students majoring in clothing and fashion, environmental education can strongly encourage responsible consumption behaviour ([Mukendi et al., 2020](#); [Williams et al., 2025](#)). Schools and universities are uniquely positioned to reach large numbers of students by weaving sustainability into business, management, fashion design, marketing, and commerce courses, not just environmental science. Teaching sustainability starts the conversation about ethical fashion and recycling, and it gives students the language and frameworks to make sense of what they see in stores and online ([Becker-Leifhold & Hirscher, 2019](#); [Jestratijević et al., 2026](#); [Williams et al., 2025](#)).

7.2 The Limits of Information Alone

Learning about sustainability does not always change buying behaviour. Young consumers still gravitate toward fast fashion because it is affordable, trendy, easy to get hold of, and popular among peers ([Cairns et al., 2021](#); [Schiaroli et al., 2024](#); [Teerakapibal & Schlegelmilch, 2024](#)). This shows that education has limits. Real-world challenges such as economic barriers and aggressive advertising can easily outweigh even the best teaching ([Maharani et al., 2025](#); [Schiaroli et al., 2024](#)).

That is why it is not sufficient merely to share information; education should also take account of social pressure and assist students in building up their confidence in their capacity to take action ([Kang et al., 2013](#); [Kumar et al., 2022](#)). Courses involving clothing swaps, repair workshops, upcycling clubs, and projects related to circular economy help transform ideas into real habits ([Jestratijević et al., 2026](#); [Portillo et al., 2025](#)).

7.3 The implications for various stakeholders

Polymakers

Government agencies may increase awareness by incorporating sustainability into the curricula of schools and colleges, by funding projects on campus, by carrying out public campaigns, and by granting money to schools that introduce innovative programmes ([Bennetta & Hill, 2022](#); [Mukendi et al., 2020](#)).

The Fashion Industry

Fashion brands can contribute to education by being open about their supply chains, respecting their workers, using sustainable materials, and avoiding false claims. The industry also has a role to play in producing items that young people actually want to buy at a price which they can afford ([Adamkiewicz et al., 2022](#); [Schiaroli et al., 2024](#)).

Youth Consumers

Each individual choice is important; choosing durable clothing, repairing things, opting for second-hand items and just buying less can all make a real difference. Young people can come to realise this impact and take action as a result of education ([Bennetta & Hill, 2022](#); [Han et al., 2024](#); [Jestratijević et al., 2026](#)).

7.4 The role of social media and influencers

Social media has become a key platform for young people to learn about fashion, including sustainable fashion. Influencers who share honest, informative content can shape attitudes and norms in powerful ways ([Ge, 2024](#); [Jacobson & Harrison, 2021](#)). Research has shown that the experience, similarity, and expertise of fashion influencers affect purchase intentions through changes in attitudes, social pressure, and perceived control ([Ge, 2024](#); [Jacobson & Harrison, 2021](#); [Maharani et al., 2025](#)). Yet social media also fuels impulsive fast-fashion buying. This double-edged nature means that education today must also include media literacy, helping students separate genuine information from hype and greenwashing ([Adamkiewicz et al., 2022](#); [Kim & Oh, 2020](#)).

8. Limitations and Further Research Directions

1. The study is of a conceptual character and involves no collection of primary data; the framework stems from a review of the existing literature and will need to be subject to empirical validation in future research.
2. The discussion is primarily concerned with young consumers, especially students. As a result, the findings might not represent the views and purchasing habits of other consumer groups, for example, working professionals, parents, or older adults.
3. The fashion industry's focus on sustainability is changing quickly. Since consumer preferences, technologies, and market practices keep on changing, the results of this review may have to be revised at a later date.
4. The literature that is currently available has been obtained from only a few countries and regions. Consequently, the experiences and problems of consumers in smaller towns or in areas that have not been extensively studied may not be properly represented.

10. Conclusion

Sustainable fashion is not just an alternative; it is becoming a necessity for the future of the fashion industry and the environment. However, bringing about this change requires more than simply making sustainable products available. It also depends on helping consumers, especially young people, understand how their everyday clothing choices affect society and the environment.

Education can play an important role in this process. While it cannot solve every challenge related to fast fashion, it can encourage students to think before they buy, choose products more responsibly, and adopt habits such as reusing, repairing, or donating clothes instead of discarding them. Small changes in daily behaviour, when adopted by many people, can make a meaningful difference over time.

The journey towards sustainable fashion requires the involvement of everyone. Researchers can provide evidence, educators can create awareness, fashion brands can offer more responsible choices, and consumers can support these efforts through informed purchasing decisions. By working together, these stakeholders can help make sustainable fashion a normal part of everyday life rather than an occasional practice.

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