

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Role of Teachers as a Leader to Promote Minimalist Lifestyle Practices Among Students: A Pathway to Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the role of educators in promoting minimalist lifestyle practices among students as a pathway toward sustainability. Minimalism, characterized by reducing material possessions and focusing on essentials, aligns closely with sustainability by minimizing resource use and waste generation. The study examines how teachers can lead efforts to incorporate minimalist principles into daily student life, fostering sustainable behaviors that reduce environmental impact and encourage mindful consumption. Through an online survey conducted among 24 students preparing for public sector examinations, the project assesses their understanding and adoption of minimalism, materialism's influence on social success, and the perceived role of teachers in this process. The findings suggest that teachers are influential in encouraging students to adopt minimalist practices, helping to reduce the consumption of unnecessary goods and mitigate the environmental consequences of overconsumption. The study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable development by illustrating the practical role educators can play in shaping future generations' attitudes toward consumption and environmental stewardship.

KEYWORDS

• Minimalism • Sustainability • Education • Environmental Awareness
• Materialism • Teacher Leadership • Student Behavior • Sustainable Development Goals • Minimalist Practices • Responsible

INTRODUCTION

Minimalism is not a lack of something. It is simply the perfect amount of something.

Nicholas Burroughs

Minimalism means living with less. It is all about removing the things we do not need in our homes daily. To be a minimalist, we need to learn to appreciate the things we have and to live without always needing more. On the

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other hand, Sustainability is about living in a way that does not damage the environment. It is all about using natural resources wisely so our planet can continue supporting us. We must think in this way because resources are limited. To be sustainable, we need to learn to be mindful of our impact on the world around us. According to the United Nations Brundtland's Commission definition, sustainability is "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Both minimalism and sustainability are about living with less. And both philosophies can help us lead more fulfilling lives. By consuming less, we can reduce our carbon footprint and help protect

the planet. Minimalism can also help us to save money and reduce waste. When we focus on buying only what we need, we are less likely to buy things we do not need or will not use, which means less waste in landfills. Concerns about the effects of overconsumption have gradually progressed from criticizing consumerism to incorporating the detrimental impact on the environment of high consumption of food, energy, and transport^[1]. That is why goal number 12 of sustainable development states about responsible consumption and production & we need to take care of that. Otherwise, we cannot achieve 2030's goals as proposed by the United Nations.



Figure 1: United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

Minimalism is an important phenomenon in people's lives that began in Asian countries like Japan. The transformation of his lifestyle from a maximalist to a minimalist was explained by Fumio Sasaki in his bestselling book "Goodbye, Things: The New Japanese Minimalism. Minimalist practices are characterized by removing clutter, being satisfied with a small number of material possessions, and giving careful consideration before making any new purchases.²

We all know that our ever-increasing addiction to electric goods, modern car culture, appetite for globally sourced goods, methane emissions, deforestation, increased usage of chemical fertilizers, and ever-increasing human population are a major cause of climate change & global warming. As a result, we all face different problems. Global warming and climate change may lead to storms, widespread flooding may result in financial loss, low summer flow of many rivers results in concentrated polluted enriched fresh water in

the river therefore different aquatic species are lost and biodiversity is greatly affected. Higher temperature expands seas and oceans, weather changes will affect the types of crop production, pollution causes various epidemics, and many more^[3]. Every anthropogenic activity has some impact on the environment. More often it is more harmful to the environment than begin. However, mankind, as it is developed today, cannot live without taking up these activities for food, security, and other needs. Consequently, there is a need to harmonize developmental activities with environmental concerns^[3].

In this study, I, as a teacher plan to give some ideas of minimalism to a group of resident students so that they can adopt it. What I believe, big things are the result of small things and small practices. If this study has a reflection on a small group of people, we can apply this to a large population at a later stage. I am hopeful that this study can be a part of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of my study are simple. By promoting a minimalist lifestyle among my students, I think I can develop the life skills for a sustainable future. Later, it will spread to every part of the society. Objectives are as follows:

1. Prioritize things based on actual needs
2. How can we live with less stress and anxiety?; As per research, a direct correlation exists between clutter and cortisol, our body's primary stress hormone^[4]. In a study, women with cluttered homes were likelier to have elevated cortisol levels later in the day than those with uncluttered dwellings^[5]. A follow-up study also showed that women with tidy homes had better moods and a more significant reduction in cortisol later in the day than those with cluttered or unfinished dwellings^[4].
3. How can we increase productivity and focus?; According to a study, the more physical objects there are in your visual field, the harder your brain works to filter them out which can increase tiredness and reduce productivity over time^[6].
4. How can we save more money?; As

research says, by cutting back on purchases and finding satisfaction in what we already have, minimalism can help us to spend significantly less. Selling your extra things can also put extra money in your pocket.

5. How can we save energy, and climate for the next generations?^[7]
6. How can we contribute to a green planet?^[7]
7. How to reduce carbon footprint?^[7]

According to a study, the depletion of natural resources and pollution produced by consumerism is not only wreaking havoc on the planet, it is also driving climate change^[7]. A study found that the production and use of household goods and services were responsible for 60 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions^[7]. By buying fewer new things and recycling, reusing, and repairing items we own, we can use significantly fewer natural resources and produce less waste and pollution^[7].

8. How to promote the slogan "Less consumerism is the key to happiness". According to research, materialism, a tendency that places great importance on material possessions, is associated with greater dissatisfaction in life^[8, 9]. Spending money on experiences, however, has the opposite effect. One study found experiential purchases (for example, taking a trip or going to a movie) can produce more happiness and positive feelings than material purchases^[10].

PROBLEM STATEMENT

After my post-graduation, I joined R.I.C.E education (a unit of Adamas University, Kolkata) as an educator to aware people about different kinds of environmental problems that are challenges at national and international levels. I have observed that many students in my classroom are worried about the costly smartphones, laptops, cars, bikes & other costly materialistic things. They believe that these can give them happiness. In this institute, they are preparing for various public sector jobs & I am worried that many of them want the job to fulfill their dreams of materialistic things. The root of my research interest is here.

After a half-decade of teaching, it is my feeling

that all issues and planning are discussed in the classroom but their practical implementation is still a challenge to our community. We want to be effective, but different environmental, curricular, financial, and political factors are barriers to us. In this contrast, I have few questions how these barriers are associated and what is the impact of these barriers on global environmental problem mitigation, how proper skill sets to lead a minimalist lifestyle give them happiness and provide a green future for the next generation? We need everyone to understand the attitudes and skills for environmental protection. Participation of every individual is required more to make our future days sustainable. Understanding national & international environmental policies, reasons for failed policy implementation, and studying the effects of rural and urban contextual differences are also important. Barriers are diverse. Local groups, NGOs, and the government should collaborate to facilitate future trainings that focus on improving content and promoting local action.

I am convinced that this project for the IGNOU PGDSSOL course is tailor-made for my research interests and it will serve as an ideal platform for realizing my career goals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the lifestyle shift of minimalism and a rising interest in sustainability over the past few decades, these two ideas are taking much more serious notice now. In minimalist living, where material possessions are sacrificed and large scale attire is shunned in favor of life's bare essentials it is a kind of lifestyle choice that lives up to sustainability's goals: minimizing resource inputs and not generating waste. Indeed, educators play an irreplaceable role in filling future generations' minds with sustainable thought, so teacher communities are a key starting block for fostering ways to live sustainably and sustainable thinking within their practices. This literature review seeks to explore two interconnected areas: (1) the challenges and issues associated with minimalist lifestyles and (2) the role of teacher communities in fostering sustainable minds, with a particular focus on how educators can promote and integrate sustainability principles into their teaching practices.

Minimalism, broadly, refers to a lifestyle characterized by the deliberate reduction

of possessions and consumption, focusing on experiences and essential needs rather than material accumulation. Scholars such as Joshua Becker^[11] and Marie Kondo^[12] have popularized minimalism through their works, which emphasize simplicity, intentional living, and mindfulness. Minimalism is often framed as a solution to overconsumption and materialism, which are linked to environmental degradation and unsustainable resource use^[13]. However, minimalist lifestyles are not without challenges. Research has highlighted several issues associated with minimalism, including its accessibility, the socio-economic implications, and its intersection with privilege and cultural factors. While minimalism advocates for a life free from excess, critics argue that the movement is often marketed to middle-class, affluent individuals^[14]. Studies indicate minimalism requires certain financial stability, as reducing possessions may not be feasible for individuals living in poverty or under economic constraints^[15]. Thus, minimalism can be criticized for being an elitist practice that is not inclusive of all societal groups. This is often considered as socio-economic barrier of minimalism. Research by Katz and Bhattacharjee^[16,17] examined the psychological impacts of a minimalist lifestyle, revealing tensions between minimalism and cultural norms that value material success and accumulation. For some, minimalism can lead to feelings of deprivation, social isolation, and anxiety^[18]. Additionally, in non-Western contexts, where community and family-oriented values dominate, minimalism may conflict with traditional cultural practices^[19]. This view denotes psychological and cultural tensions related to minimalism.

One of the driving forces behind the minimalist movement is its potential to reduce environmental impact. Minimalism is seen as reducing one's carbon footprint and contributing to sustainability by consuming less. However, research by Holt & Bjorklund^[15] highlights a paradox: the desire to "declutter" often leads to the disposal of usable items, contributing to waste. Moreover, the rise of "eco-minimalism" has sparked debates about whether the movement's environmental benefits are as substantial as claimed, given that it can still foster consumption patterns in the guise of "conscious consumerism"^[20].

The Role of Education in Promoting Sustainability Education has long been

recognized as a key tool in promoting sustainable development^[21]. As per my thoughts and some research, teachers play a critical role in instilling values of sustainability, environmental consciousness, and responsible consumption in students. Teacher communities, and collaborative networks of educators sharing resources, ideas, and pedagogical strategies are crucial in shaping sustainable minds. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have gained traction as effective models for collaborative learning among educators^[22]. Research has shown that PLCs focused on sustainability can enhance teachers' understanding of sustainability concepts and improve their ability to integrate these into the curriculum^[23]. PLCs provide a platform for teachers to exchange best practices, challenge each other's thinking, and collaboratively develop sustainability-focused teaching methods. While teacher communities offer great potential in promoting sustainability, they also face challenges. Research by Fullan^[24] identifies barriers such as time constraints, limited resources, and insufficient training on sustainability topics. Teachers often lack the time and institutional support to engage deeply with sustainability issues^[25]. Furthermore, the pressure to meet standardized testing requirements can push sustainability education to the margins of the curriculum^[26]. Sustainable education requires innovative pedagogical approaches that go beyond traditional subject areas. Studies by Nolet and Sterling^[27,26] highlight the importance of interdisciplinary learning, experiential education, and place-based learning in fostering sustainable mindsets. These approaches emphasize real-world connections, critical thinking, and the development of ecological literacy. Several scholars have argued that empowering teachers to become sustainability leaders is key to creating systemic change within educational institutions^[28,29]. Teacher communities can foster leadership by providing opportunities for professional development, mentorship, and peer support. However, teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively lead sustainability initiatives^[30]. Moreover, the minimalist movement presents an opportunity for individuals to lead more sustainable, intentional lives, but it also raises important questions about accessibility, privilege, and cultural implications. Teacher

communities are essential in shaping the next generation's understanding of sustainability. By providing educators with collaborative spaces to share knowledge and best practices, these communities can play a pivotal role in cultivating sustainable minds. However, further research and policy efforts are needed to address the barriers educators face in integrating sustainability into their teaching practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I created an online survey form that was circulated through Whats App or e-mails. My study was restricted among 24 resident students of my present organization where they are preparing for various public sector examinations. The responses of each participant were collected using a linked survey that was automatically generated and recorded. The range of the age of participants varies between 20 to 30 years. No other demographic variables such as ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. were considered in the proposed study. The questionnaire included 12 questions covering various sides of lifestyles specifically focused to usage of smartphones and the concept of minimalism. The survey was done by using the free software "Microsoft Form" and the further results were analyzed using MS Excel. Questions were asked in the form of multiple-choice & opinion- based formats. There were no right and wrong answers but it helped to analyze the overall opinion. After collecting the data, Respective graphs were prepared by using MS- Excel. The following questions were asked in the online survey.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. Do you use any electronic device for your preparation? - Yes/No
4. How many smartphones do you have? 1/2/3/More
5. What is the age of your smartphone? (In case you have more than one please use the age of the latest one) – less than 6 months/ More than 1 year/ More than 2 years
6. Do you think you need more than 1

smartphone for your work?

-Yes/No

7. Do you know the concept of Minimalism?
- Yes/No
8. What are your opinions on adopting minimalism?
9. Do you practice minimalism in your life?
10. Do you have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) syndrome?
11. What is your life goal? Do you think, the consumption of materialistic things defines social success?
12. Do you think your teachers can play a great role in adopting the minimalist lifestyle for your present & future?

RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



A snap of my teaching with residential students

The data contains responses from individuals regarding their use of electronic devices, minimalist practices, and views on materialism. Please note that electronic device means smartphones. The responses related to questions are presented in the form of an annexure at the end. Here is how the analysis can be structured for the Results and Discussion.

RESULTS

Demographics: Respondents were aged between 21 and 25 years except one.

Life Goals: As they all are preparing for a government job, their main goal is to become a govt servant.

Smartphone Usage: All respondents use smartphones for their preparation.

The majority own between 1 and 3 devices,

with most reporting that they are over a year old.

A common sentiment is that more than one device is necessary for their work.

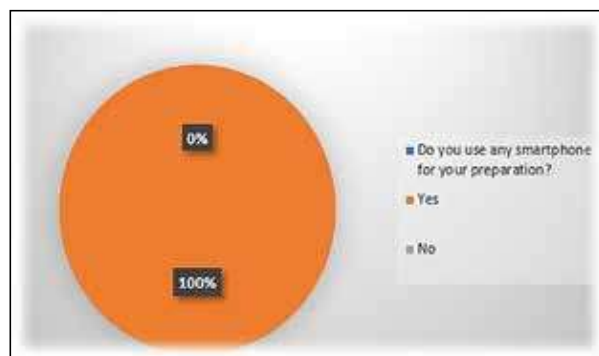
Minimalism: Several respondents practice minimalism, while others are undecided.

Materialism: Many respondents expressed that the consumption of material things somewhat defines social success, though some disagreed.

Role of Teachers: All respondents agreed that teachers can influence their adoption of a minimalist lifestyle.

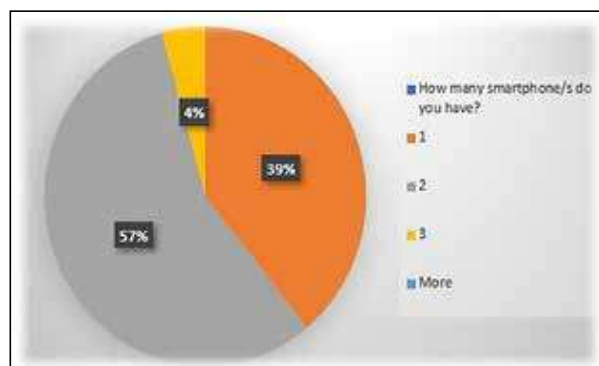
GRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Question 3: Do you use any smartphone for your preparation?



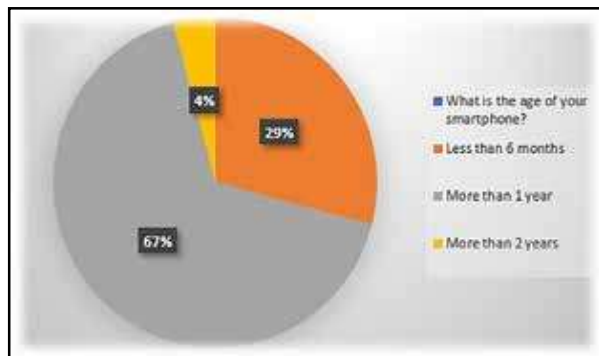
Result: All the participants use smartphones for their preparation

Question 4: How many smartphone/s do you have?



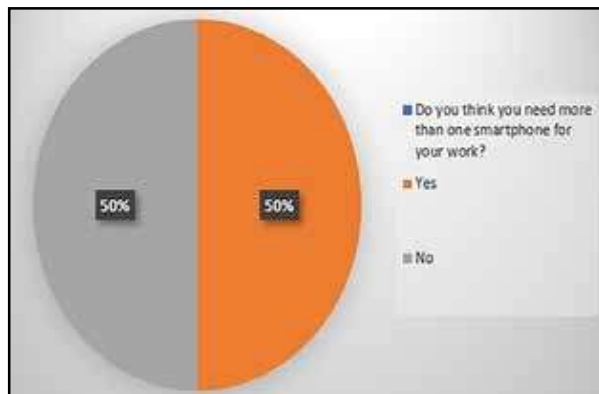
Result: 9 out of 24 students use only one smartphone, 13 out of 24 use two smartphones, 1 out of 24 uses 3 smartphones

Question 5: What is the age of your smartphone? (In case you have more than one please use the age of the latest one)



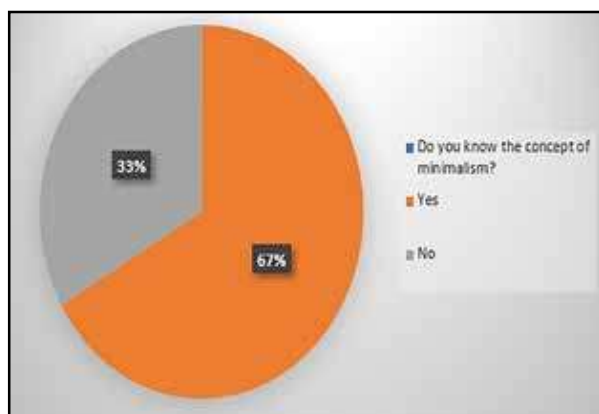
Result: 7 out of 24 students use smartphones aged less than six months, 16 out of 24 use smartphones aged more than one year, 1 out of 24 uses smartphones more than 2 years

Question 6: Do you think you need more than 1 smartphone for your work?



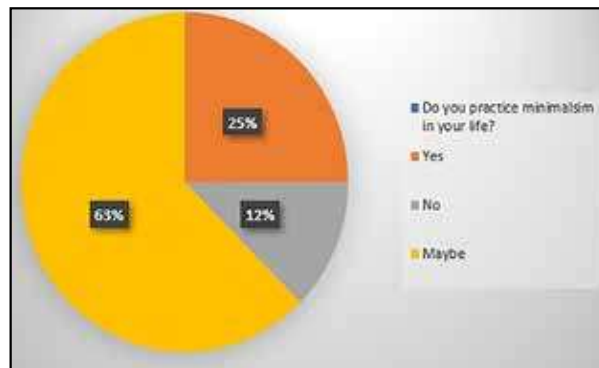
Result: 12 out of 24 students think that they need more than one smartphone while others do not.

Question 7: Do you know the concept of Minimalism?



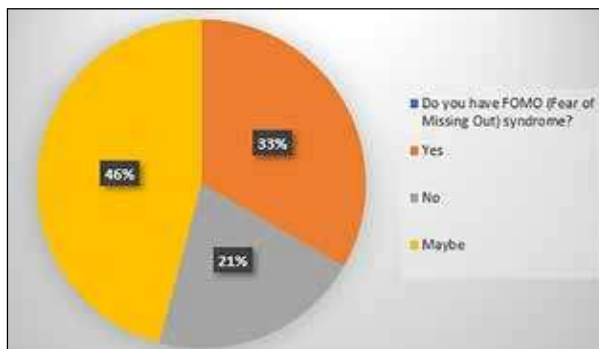
Result: 16 out of 24 students know the concept the minimalism

Question 9: Do you practice minimalism in your life?



Result: 6 out of 24 students practice minimalism in their life, 3 out of 24 students do not practice minimalism while 15 others are not sure about practicing minimalism in their life.

Question 10: Do you have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) syndrome?



Result: 8 out of 24 students have FOMO syndrome, 5 out of 24 students do not have the FOMO syndrome, 11 out of 24 are not sure about FOMO syndrome

DISCUSSION

The data suggests that younger individuals (ages 21-25) are aware of both the need for technology in their studies and the benefits of minimalism. However, there is a conflict between their awareness of materialism and the pressure they feel to accumulate material goods for perceived social success. Teachers, viewed as role models, are seen as having a significant influence in promoting a minimalist lifestyle, which can help balance the use of technology and reduce unnecessary consumption. Here I add more insights about the teacher's role and the relationship between social success and materialism. Teachers play an important role in shaping students' values and behaviors. Their influence extends beyond academic education, particularly in areas such as sustainable living, where ethics,

environment, and social responsibility come into action. Survey respondents generally agreed that teachers can influence the adoption of a passive lifestyle. This sentiment is consistent with educational principles that emphasize the power of teachers to instill lifelong values in their students. For example, social learning theory suggests that students often model behaviors observed in authority figures, like teachers. By modeling minimalism and sustainability, teachers can encourage students to adopt these behaviors in their daily lives. Furthermore, in contemporary education, there has been a strong emphasis on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This approach encourages teachers to incorporate sustainability principles into their curriculum from reducing consumption to developing environmental awareness. Research shows that students who have involvement in ESD often involve sustainable practices, such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and resource management promoted by teachers and a thorough assessment of social needs can have directly influencing students' sustainable behavior, helping them make consumer choices, use digital devices, and make conscious purchases. This can lead to sustainable architecture, where individuals value experiences and the long-term health of the environment over short-term customer satisfaction. The survey data reveals that respondents largely view materialism as a factor in defining social success, though there is some dissent. This reflects a larger societal narrative in which material possessions are often seen as symbols of achievement, status, and success. Some research in consumer psychology suggests that materialism the value placed on possessions as a measure of personal success correlates with lower levels of well-being and higher environmental degradation^[31-39]. Excessive material consumption in turn leads to greater resource depletion, pollution, and environmental harm. Teachers can play a critical role in challenging the materialistic notion of social success. By incorporating discussions of materialism, environmental ethics, and sustainable living into their lessons, teachers can foster critical thinking in students. This will enable young people to question societal norms around consumption and success. Moreover, teachers who model sustainable behaviors such as reducing their consumption or advocating for eco-friendly practices in

schools can serve as powerful role models for students. The key is to make sustainability and minimalism as a part of the educational fabric. Teachers can inspire students to view success not in terms of material wealth but in terms of personal fulfillment, community well-being, and environmental stewardship^[40]. We can also cite the incident of Chetan Singh Solanki, a professor of IIT Bombay, often considered as Solar Man of India, wearing torn socks at a 5-star hotel. In a reply to the press, he replied *"I can afford it, but nature cannot."* This is the way I think about how can teachers influence minimalism. This is featured in various top newspapers like the Hindustan Times, The Times of India, etc.

Now, as my study is related to the use of smartphones for a sustainable future, I have more words to say about the role of teachers to aware their students about using smartphones. Below I describe the strategies briefly.

1. Raise Awareness through Education

Teachers can educate students about the environmental impact of e-waste, particularly how smartphones contribute to it. They can incorporate lessons on the life cycle of electronics, the resources required for manufacturing, and the consequences of improper disposal.

Example: A study showed that when students were educated about sustainability issues, they became more conscious of their behaviors, leading to reduced e-waste generation^[41].

2. Promote Digital Detox Initiatives

Encouraging students to periodically disengage from smartphones can help reduce the demand for frequent upgrades and ultimately lower e-waste.

Example: Research has found that reducing screen time and engaging in "digital detox" activities promotes mindfulness and reduces the desire to frequently upgrade devices^[42].

3. Foster a Repair and Reuse Culture

Teachers can organize workshops or projects that focus on repairing and maintaining existing devices, rather than discarding them for new ones. Teaching students basic repair skills can extend the lifespan of their smartphones, decreasing the frequency of disposal.

Example: Research from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation advocates for repair and reuse as core elements of the circular economy, reducing the need for new devices^[43].

4. Encourage Responsible Recycling

Incorporating programs that promote responsible recycling of smartphones can help reduce e-waste. Teachers can set up e-waste collection drives or partner with recycling companies to ensure proper disposal of electronic devices.

Example: Studies have shown that school-led e-waste recycling campaigns have a significant impact on community awareness and participation in recycling efforts^[44].

5. Leverage Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Using PBL, teachers can involve students in hands-on sustainability projects where they research and propose solutions to the problem of e-waste. This method not only educates students about the issue but also empowers them to take actionable steps towards reducing e-waste.

Example: A study in environmental education found that project-based learning enhanced students' understanding of sustainability issues and motivated them to act responsibly^[45].

6. Encourage Mindful Technology Consumption

Teachers can highlight the importance of mindful consumption, encouraging students to resist the pressure to upgrade to the latest devices. Students can be shown how to assess whether a new device is truly necessary and the environmental impact of their consumption choices.

Example: Research has shown that when consumers are educated about the environmental costs of their technology choices, they are more likely to delay purchasing new electronics^[46].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I must say that teachers have a huge influence on how young people understand and navigate the world. By promoting simplicity and challenging objective visions of success. We can play our part in changing the culture towards sustainability. Educating students about the

environmental costs of over consumption and the personal benefits of minimalism not only encourages more sustainable behavior, but it also encourages students to have a more rewarding and purposeful life. The relationship between social success, materialism, and sustainability is complex. However, teachers have a unique position to shape the views of future generations. By leading them on a more sustainable and less materialistic path. In addition, I can say that educational institutions can be at the forefront of this change, with teachers acting as the bridge between knowledge and behavior. By fostering a minimalist mindset and re-evaluating the metrics for social success, teachers can help students cultivate a mindset that aligns with the principles of sustainability. This could result in future generations that prioritize environmental well-being, reject excessive material consumption, and redefine success more holistically.

LIMITATIONS

This is a micro-level study. More variable factors related to lifestyle are required and how they are associated with people's demands must be analyzed. Moreover, my study is based on a group of adult students only. We need more studies from various age groups to give a complete result for the outcome. The need varies according to age. Therefore, this study does not satisfy the complete social scenario.

FURTHER SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The current study provides valuable insights into how teachers can promote a minimalist lifestyle as a path toward sustainability. However, several areas warrant further exploration to build upon these findings and deepen our understanding of the role of minimalism and sustainability in education:

- **Broader Demographic Studies:** This study focuses on a small group of adult students preparing for public sector jobs. Future research should include participants from diverse age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographical locations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how minimalism and materialism are perceived across different segments of

society. This could help identify whether age, income, or cultural context influences the adoption of minimalist practices.

- **Longitudinal Studies:** A long-term study tracking the behavior of students exposed to minimalist teachings over several years would provide more conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of teachers in promoting lasting lifestyle changes. This would help us understand whether these teachings result in sustained behavioral change and contribute to a reduction in material consumption and an increase in sustainable practices.
- **Impact on Environmental Footprint:** While the study highlights the connection between minimalism and sustainability, more specific research is needed to quantify the environmental benefits of adopting minimalist lifestyles. This could include examining reductions in carbon footprint, waste production, and energy consumption in individuals who have embraced minimalism compared to those who have not.
- **Cultural Barriers to Minimalism:** The study mentions that minimalism may not be accessible or desirable in all cultural contexts. Further research could explore the cultural and psychological barriers to adopting minimalism, particularly in communities that place a high value on material possessions as indicators of success. This could lead to strategies for promoting minimalism in ways that are culturally sensitive and inclusive.
- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Investigating how teachers can be better equipped to promote sustainability and minimalism in their classrooms would be another fruitful area of research. Professional development programs focused on sustainability education and how to integrate these principles into various subjects could be studied to determine their effectiveness in changing both teacher and student behaviors.
- **Minimalism in Public Policy:** Research into how minimalist principles can influence public policy, particularly in areas related to education, urban planning, and consumer behavior, could

be valuable. This would explore whether governmental support for minimalism, through regulations or incentives, could foster broader societal adoption and contribute to achieving global sustainability goals.

- **Intersection of Technology and Minimalism:** Since the respondents indicated a reliance on electronic devices, future research could explore the balance between the necessity of technology and the principles of minimalism. This could involve investigating how digital minimalism a conscious approach to reducing technological clutter could play a role in sustainability and well-being.

By addressing these areas, future research could contribute to a more holistic understanding of the intersection between education, minimalism, materialism, and sustainability.

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