

# Exploring the Perspectives of Ghanaian Youth on the Sustainable Development Goals: Awareness, Attitudes, and Practice

Alex Danso<sup>1\*</sup>, Erica Owusuaa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PNAJ Research and Business Consult

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science, University of Education, Winneba

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

The United Nations recognizes the youths of today as essential stakeholders and vehicles through which the SDGs can be achieved. This is because the young people of today are going to be the leaders, innovators, and change-makers of tomorrow. The knowledge and practice of the youth towards the SDGs is thus essential if we can achieve the SDGs. This study therefore examined the perspective of the youths in Ghana concerning the SDGs. Quantitative and explanatory research approaches were employed to gather and analyze data. The study administered a questionnaire through an online survey to 384 youths in the Ashanti region of Ghana. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data with the aid of SPSS. The study found that there is a statistically significant relationship among awareness, attitude, and practices of the youths related to sustainable development. While there was a generally high level of awareness and a positive attitude, turning these into consistent sustainable practices remains an uphill task. The results show that Ghanaian youths have a positive attitude towards the SDGs, but in real life, convenience, cost, and lifestyle hinder them from fully acting on sustainability. The study therefore recommends that the government and other stakeholders implement robust educational campaigns that not only raise awareness but also instill in the youth the importance of making life changes and adopting sustainable behaviors. The government should provide incentives and subsidies to encourage businesses to produce green products which can make sustainable choices more convenient and accessible to the youths in Ghana. The government should also ensure strict environmental regulations. These measures can help in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice, ultimately fostering an environmentally conscious and sustainable society.

**Keywords:** Attitudinal change, Environmental awareness, Ghanaian perspectives, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Youth engagement

## INTRODUCTION

*“The future of humanity and our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations.”*(2030 Agenda, paragraph 5). The preceding statement indicates the crucial role of the youths in the realization of Sustainable Development Goals. It shows that the youths of today serve as essential stakeholders and vehicles through which the SDGs can be realized. This study seeks to understand how Ghanaian youth are being integrated into the implementation of the SDGs by exploring their awareness, attitudes, and practices toward the SDGs.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals established by the United Nations and its member states in 2015 as a commitment towards economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Ismail et al., 2022). The SDGs represent an ambitious response of the international community to contemporary global development concerns and direct the developmental objectives for this generation. The major goals of SDGs are about reducing poverty, protecting the planet, and securing global peace (Kumar and Roy, 2018). The SDGs consist of seventeen specific goals, 169 targets, and 263 indicators set to be accomplished within a

timeline extending from 2015 to 2030. The SDGs rest on five foundational pillars which include people, prosperity, peace, partnership, and the planet (Kumar and Roy, 2018).

The UN urges its member states to integrate the SDGs into their national and subnational development programs (Breuer et al., 2023). Although the implementation is optional to these member states, its execution is crucial for the continuation of prior global sustainable development initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Agenda 21 (Breuer et al., 2023). Several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have begun the implementation of some targeted policies to enhance the achievements of the SDGs. The Government of Uganda for instance implemented the Green Growth and Climate Resilience Plan to address challenges brought about by climate change thereby ensuring sustainable economic growth (Twinomuhangi et al., 2022). Kenya has also adopted Vision 2030 as a comprehensive policy geared toward elevating the nation to middle-income status by the year 2030 (Jacobsen et al., 2023). The Government of Ghana has initiated several policies such as the free compulsory universal primary education (FCUBE) and the free Senior High School which seeks to extend primary and secondary education to all school-age children to facilitate the achievement of the SDG four; ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Darkwa and Acquah, 2022). Also, the Planting for Food and Jobs policy aims to improve the production, availability, accessibility, and stability of food prices to aid the eradication of hunger and poverty in all its forms (Pauw, 2022). Other policies include the Ghana Renewable Policy Act (2013) and the National Health Insurance policy (Ayisi et al., 2023).

However, after nearly a decade of cooperation and collaboration, not much progress has been realized in the attainment of the SDGs. The United Nations Statistics Division (2023) indicates that the crisis caused by climate change, the war in Ukraine, the flattening global economy, and the continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought on vulnerabilities and dragged down progress toward the goals. The report further projected that about 575 million people - 7 percent of the world's total population - will still live in conditions of extreme poverty by 2030. It also says that the ways to eradicate extreme poverty might prove very challenging, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and countries torn apart by conflict (UNSD, 2023). Whereas the incidents of hunger and food insecurity have increased since 2015, it has been influenced by the pandemic, conflict, climate change, and growing inequities. In 2015, 589 million people experienced hunger, while this number had increased to 768 million in the year 2021 (UNSD, 2023). Forecasts indicate that by 2030, over 670 million individuals will still experience hunger, constituting 8 percent of the global population, consistent with the statistics from 2015 (UNSD, 2023). In 2021, essential routine vaccination services were deficient for 25 million children, and mortality from tuberculosis and malaria increased relative to the pre-pandemic period (UNSD, 2023). The preceding indicates that much effort must be exerted, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, if we are to attain the SDGs.

This study contends that Africa may substantially contribute to the SDGs by engaging the youths. The United Nations defines youth as individuals within the age range of 15 and 24 (Cieslik et al., 2022). The African Union and the government of Ghana adopt a similar definition and describe youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 (African Union, 2020). This study adopts the definition put forth by the government of Ghana as such, conceptualizes youth as all individuals in Ghana who fall between the ages of 15 and 35. Africa possesses the youngest population of all continents, with a significant percentage of its inhabitants classified as youth. Young Africans constitute about 42 percent of the global youth demographic and account for 75 percent of those under 35 years of age in Africa (African Union, 2020). The 2021 population and housing census indicates that about 38% of Ghana's population falls between the ages of 15 and 35; indicating that the youth has the greater percentage of the Ghanaian population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This study therefore agrees with Sumberg et al. (2020) who contended that Africa's substantial youthful population warrants prioritization in the implementation of the SDGs due to their distinctive capacity to promote sustainable development on the continent.

This study further maintains that young Ghanaians are the predominant demographic possessing the energy, inventiveness, and innovative mindset necessary to tackle urgent challenges across many SDGs. The young people of today are going to be the leaders, innovators, and change-makers of tomorrow (Zu, 2020). This underscores the need to study the awareness, attitude, and practices of the youth in Ghana concerning such pressing issues as education, health, environmental sustainability, and social justice. However, previous

researchers in Ghana have barely conducted a study in this regard. The existing studies like that of Kusi-Mensah et al. (2022) aimed to identify the possible accelerators for achieving SDGs for adolescents in Ghana. Cognitive stimulation, a low student-teacher ratio, and no relative poverty were the four core accelerators to achieve SDGs among adolescents in Ghana. Boafo et al. (2024) considered perceptions and enablers of Ghanaian students toward the attainment of SDGs. Evidence showed that Ghanaian University students had expressed substantial confidence in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals relevant to excellent education, gender equality, and clean water and had doubts about objectives related to ending poverty and zero hunger. Owusu (2021) investigated what approaches work best for accomplishing gender equality and good health in adolescent females in Ghana. It is evidenced from the review that existing studies have focused on assessing the achievement of the SDGs relating to the youth without dedicating similar attention to examining attitudes and practices of the youth towards the SDGs. It is in this regard that this study sought to explore the awareness, attitude, and practice of Ghanaian youth toward the SDGs. Such an understanding is significant for designing effective policies and interventions for their personal development, in a manner that would tap into their potential for making meaningful contributions toward the progress of society. The study also bears importance in terms of ensuring that future generations will be able to cope with global challenges and work towards sustainable development.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research approach

This study adopted the quantitative research approach to gather and analyze data on the perspective of the Ghanaian youth on the SDGs. The quantitative approach was appropriate for this study as it uses numerical data obtained from observations to define and elucidate a phenomenon (Taherdoost, 2022). Consequently, the quantitative research approach enabled these researchers to employ a survey instrument to collect numerical data from a comparatively larger population, evaluate it, and test the hypothesis that underlined the study. The quantitative technique thus improved the objectivity and generalizability of the study's findings (Strijker et al., 2020).

### Research design

This study employs an explanatory research design to examine the perspective of Ghanaian youth on the SDGs. The decision to employ the explanatory design aligns with the standpoint of Niehaves and Ortbach (2016), who contended that this design is most appropriate when information regarding the phenomenon under investigation is scarce, and for analyzing the relationship between variables or establishing causality in a study. This study employed an explanatory design utilizing quantitative techniques to explore the relationship between awareness, attitude, and practices of the youth on SDGs.

### Population of the study

The research population classifies the principal group with which the research is concerned (Casteel and Bridier, 2021). The population of research refers to the group of people or entities to whom the findings and outcome of the study will be applied (Hossan et al., 2023). The population of this study was determined by the objectives that the research sought to attain (Hossan et al., 2023). Asiamah et al. (2017) asserted that it is significant for the researcher to properly define the population of the research. This is because the population is a major factor that determines the credibility of the research findings. The population of this study comprised all youth within the Ashanti region of Ghana. The study concentrated on the population of all individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 who reside in the Ashanti region. The study focused on the Ashanti region because it is the region with the relatively larger youthful population in Ghana. Thus, since the researchers could not access the entire youthful population in Ghana, it was prudent to focus on the Ashanti region which could provide a relatively fair representation of the youthful population in Ghana.

### Sample size and sampling technique

Researchers should ascertain an appropriate sample size for data collection, as the target audience may be excessively big to engage (Hossan et al., 2023). Chaokromthong and Sintao (2021) stated that quantitative

researchers may utilize tables or mathematical formulas to ascertain the suitable sample size for a study. These researchers therefore employed Cochran's sample size calculation formulae to determine the sample size of respondents who participated in the study. Cochran's formulae was used because of its suitability in determining the accurate sample size for a larger population or unknown population. Thus, this sample size formulae was appropriate because the population size for the youth in the Ashanti region was unknown at the time of the conducting of this study.

Cochran's formulae for sample size calculation;

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where;

n = the required sample size

Z = the Z value = 1.96

p = the estimated proportion of the population = 0.5

e = margin of error = 0.05

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{0.05^2} = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16 = 384$$

Following the calculation above 384 youths were selected from the Ashanti region to participate in the study. The 384 youths were selected through a convenience sampling technique. By using the convenience sampling technique, the researchers selected the respondents based on their availability and readiness to participate in the study. The researchers sent invitations to targeted respondents through various online media including emails and WhatsApp platforms. The invitation was sent to the targeted respondents in the form of a Google form, explaining the purpose of the study to the respondents and how the findings of the study could benefit the respondents. Further, the Google form described the role of the respondents if they agreed to participate in the study and the ethical considerations that guided the study. Consequently, the youths who agreed to take part in the study were asked to sign a consent form by providing the initials of their first and last names and their email addresses. The initials were useful for anonymity and confidentiality. Four weeks were dedicated for these invitations and kind reminders were sent to prompt target respondents to respond to the invite. The youths who agreed to take part in the survey returned the consent form and emails to the researchers. A total of 402 youths agreed to take part in the study.

### Research instrument and Data collection procedure

The study employed a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was structured into four sections. The first section gathered data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section gathered data on the awareness of the youth on SDGs, section three focused on attitude and section four gathered data on the practices of the youth on SDGs. The questionnaire items in sections two, three, and four were patterned after a five-point Likert scale. Also, the items on the second, third, and fourth sections of the questionnaire were adopted from Al-Nuaimi and Al-Ghamdi (2022), Ilham et al. (2021), and Balakrishnan et al. (2019) with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.750, 0.834, and 0.876, respectively, thereby ensuring the reliability (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The data for this study was collected through an online survey. The questionnaire was prepared in Google form and sent to the youth who agreed to participate in the study through their email address which were gathered at the time of inviting the respondents. A total of 402 questionnaires were distributed to the youth. Four weeks were used for the data collection. Four weeks were deemed as ample time since the respondents had already been invited and accepted to take part in the study. The researchers periodically sent kind reminders to remind the respondents who had not responded or submitted their questionnaires. Out of the 402 questionnaires that

were distributed, 391 were returned to the researchers representing a 97.3% response rate.

### Data processing and analysis

The data collected were cleansed and coded into an Excel file for onward analysis with the aid of SPSS. The data cleansing process showed that 7 of the questionnaires were incomplete as some of the respondents did not provide answers to some items on the questionnaire. These 7 uncompleted questionnaires were removed from the dataset. The remaining 384 questionnaires were transferred from the Excel application into SPSS for analysis. The study used descriptive statistics (i.e., means, frequencies, percentages) and inferential statistics to analyze the data with the help of IBM SPSS. The results of the descriptive statistics were presented in simple statistical illustrations such as frequency, mean, standard deviations, and percentages from which inferences were made. Furthermore, the study employed Pearson’s correlation to estimate the relationship between awareness, attitude, and practice of youths towards the SDGs.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented under four main themes; demographic characteristics, awareness, attitude, and practice of the youth towards SDGs. This section further presents findings on the relationship between the awareness, attitude, and practice of the youth towards SDGs.

### Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics included in this study were gender, age, educational level, field of study, residential status, employment status, and household income level. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	263	68.5%
Female	121	31.5%
<b>Age</b>		
15 - 20	18	4.7%
21 - 25	141	36.7%
26 - 30	154	40.1%
31 - 35	71	18.5%
<b>Educational level</b>		
Basic Education	5	1.3%
Secondary Education	5	1.3%
Diploma	16	4.2%
Undergraduate	299	77.9%
Postgraduate (Master's)	59	15.4%
<b>Field of study</b>		

Social Science	164	42.7%
Natural Science	16	4.2%
Engineering/Technology	60	15.6%
Business/Management	103	26.8%
Health Science	17	4.4%
Fine Arts	20	5.2%
Other	5	1%
<b>Residential status</b>		
Lives with Family	154	40.1%
Rents	230	59.9%
<b>Employment status</b>		
Full-time student	122	31.8%
Part-time employment	34	8.9%
Full-time employment	135	35.2%
Self-employment	32	8.3%
Unemployment	61	15.9%
<b>Household Income Level</b>		
Less than GHC 1000	120	31.3%
GHC 1000 - GHC 5000	158	41.1%
GHC 5001 - GHC 10,000	35	9.1%
prefer not to say	71	18.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Online survey (2024)

It is observed from Table 1 that 68.5% of the respondents were males and 31.5% were females. 4.7% of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 20, 36.7% were 21 – 25, 40.1% were 26 – 30 and 18.5% were 31 – 35 years. For educational level, Table 1 shows that 1.3% of the respondents had attained a basic educational level, 1.3% had secondary level education, 4.2% had a diploma, 77.9% had undergraduate education and 15.4% had a Master’s degree. 42.7% of the respondents read programs related to social science, 4.2% read natural science, 15.6% studied programs associated with engineering/technology, 26.8% studied business/management, 4.4% studied health sciences, 5.2% studied fine arts and 1% indicated that they read other programs not listed on the questionnaire.

With residential status, 40.1% of the respondents live with the family and 59.9% live in rented houses. The findings further show that 31.8% of the respondents were full-time students, 8.9% were part-time employed, 35.2% were full-time employed, 8.3% were self-employed and 15.9% were unemployed. The findings further revealed that 31.3% of the respondents had a household income of less than GHC.1000.00, 41.1% earned GHC 1000.00 and GHC 5000.00, 9.1% earned GHC 5001.00 - GHC 10,000.00 and 18.5% of the respondents

preferred not to state their household income.

### Awareness of the youth on the SDGs

The study also examined the level of awareness of the SDGs among the youth in Ghana. The findings have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Awareness of the Youth on the SDGs

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
SDGs involve considering both the needs of the present and the future generations.	10.2%	7.3%	6.0%	33.3%	43.2%	3.92	1.302
SDGs include considerations of social justice and equity.	6.0%	8.3%	16.9%	36.5%	32.3%	3.81	1.154
Economic development, social development, and environmental protection are all necessary for sustainable development.	7.3%	7.3%	9.9%	26.8%	48.7%	4.02	1.240
Emphasizes education for a culture of peace.	11.2%	6.0%	18.2%	39.3%	25.3%	3.61	1.240
Sustainable consumption includes using goods and services in ways that minimize the use of natural resources and toxic chemicals and reduce waste.	1.6%	15.6%	17.2%	40.9%	24.7%	3.72	1.052
SDGs emphasize gender equality.	6.0%	13.8%	18.8%	27.9%	33.6%	3.69	1.235
Helping people out of poverty in Ghana is an essential condition for Ghana to become more sustainable.	4.2%	9.1%	15.6%	40.1%	31.0%	3.85	1.089
SDGs seek to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources.	4.2%	12.0%	12.2%	43.5%	28.1%	3.79	1.104
SDGs support cultural diversity.	9.9%	11.2%	15.9%	36.5%	26.6%	3.59	1.263
SDGs emphasize respect for human rights.	7.3%	9.6%	14.6%	31.3%	37.2%	3.82	1.237
Maintaining biodiversity—the number and variety of living organisms—is essential to the effective functioning of ecosystems.	8.9%	7.0%	14.6%	22.1%	47.4%	3.92	1.302
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>3.7877</b>	<b>.9989</b>

Source: Online survey (2024)

Table 2 shows the results of responses regarding SDGs awareness among youths in Ghana. To the statement that the SDGs involve considering both the needs of the present and the future generations, a greater

proportion strongly agreed 43.2%, while those who agreed 33.3%, strongly disagreed 10.2%, disagreed 7.3%, and natural 6.0%, with a mean of 3.92 and a standard deviation of 1.302. This suggests that a good understanding of the intergenerational responsibility encapsulated in the notion of sustainable development is realized among a huge number of respondents. That notwithstanding, concerning the inclusion of social justice and equity in the SDGs, 32.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed, while 6.0% strongly disagreed and 8.3% disagreed, with 16.9% neutral (mean = 3.81, SD = 1.154). This means that a number of the youth are aware of the social justice components within the SDGs, even though several are uncertain.

In the process of sustainable development, the balance of economic, social, and environmental development: 48.7% strongly agreed and 26.8% agreed, while 7.3% strongly disagreed 7.3% disagreed and 9.9% expressed neutral opinions. (Mean = 4.02, SD = 1.240). On the question of whether the SDGs emphasize education for a culture of peace, 25.3% strongly agreed and 39.3% agreed while 11.2% strongly disagreed, 6.0% disagreed and 18.2% were neutral with a mean of 3.61 and an SD of 1.240 showing a moderate level of awareness on this point.

For sustainable consumption, minimizing the use of resources and reduction of waste, 24.7% strongly agreed and 40.9% agreed, while 1.6% strongly disagreed, 15.6% disagreed, and 17.2% were neutral with a mean of 3.72 and SD of 1.052, showing good awareness about responsible consumption. Regarding gender equality within SDGs, 33.6% strongly agreed and 27.9% agreed, while 6.0% strongly disagreed, 13.8% disagreed, and 18.8% were neutral, with a mean of 3.69 and SD of 1.235. The need for poverty reduction if Ghana is to be sustainable: 31.0% strongly agreed, while 40.1% agreed; 4.2% strongly disagreed 9.1% disagreed, and 15.6% undecided - mean = 3.85, SD = 1.089. Thus, it indicates that the youth appreciate that eradication of poverty is fundamental to ensuring sustainable development.

About the balance between human well-being and respect for natural resources, 28.1% strongly agreed and 43.5% agreed, while 4.2% strongly disagreed, 12.0% disagreed, and 12.2% were neutral (mean = 3.79, SD = 1.104). On how the SDGs help promote cultural diversity, 26.6% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed, while 9.9% strongly disagreed 11.2% disagreed and 15.9% were neutral (mean = 3.59, SD = 1.263). Regarding the emphasis on human rights, 37.2% strongly agreed, while 31.3% agreed; 7.3% strongly disagreed, 9.6% disagreed, and 14.6% remained neutral (mean = 3.82, SD = 1.237).

Finally, about maintaining biodiversity for ecosystem health: 47.4% strongly agreed, 22.1% agreed, 8.9% strongly disagreed, 7.0% disagreed, and 14.6% were neutral (mean = 3.92, SD = 1.302). Overall, the mean score on the awareness of the Ghanaian youth on SDGs is 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.9989, and thus it may be observed that there is generally quite a good awareness amongst the respondents about the SDGs but variable understanding as far as some specifics are concerned.

### Attitude of the Youth towards SDGs

The second objective of the study was to examine the attitude of the youth towards SDGs. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Attitude of the Youth towards SDGs

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Every girl or boy should receive an education that teaches the knowledge, perspectives, values, issues, and skills for sustainable living in a community.	7.6%	6.8%	12.8%	34.9%	38.0%	3.89	1.204
The present generation should ensure that the next generation inherits a community at least as healthy, diverse, and productive as it is today	19.5%	8.3%	25.0%	18.0%	29.2%	3.29	1.460



Manufacturers should discourage the use of disposables	7.6%	8.3%	13.3%	35.7%	35.2%	3.83	1.213
Overuse of our natural resources is a serious threat to the health and welfare of future generations.	10.2%	5.7%	10.2%	31.0%	43.0%	3.91	1.292
We need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment]	7.0%	8.9%	18.8%	29.7%	35.7%	3.78	1.220
Poverty alleviation is an important topic in education for sustainable development.	5.7%	8.3%	10.2%	35.2%	40.6%	3.97	1.166
The teaching of sustainability principles should be integrated into the curriculum in all disciplines and at all levels of schooling.	7.3%	8.6%	22.7%	31.5%	29.9%	3.68	1.195
Governments should encourage greater use of fuel-efficient vehicles.	11.5%	13.8%	12.0%	33.3%	29.4%	3.55	1.343
Sustainable development will not be possible until wealthier nations stop exploiting poorer countries' labor and natural resources.	5.7%	3.1%	18.2%	35.7%	37.2%	3.96	1.094
Taxes on polluters should be increased to pay for damage to communities and the environment.	8.3%	4.4%	15.9%	39.6%	31.8%	3.82	1.173
Environmentally sustainable companies are more likely to be profitable over the long run	11.5%	15.9%	47.4%	14.1%	11.2%	2.98	1.099
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>3.70</b>	<b>.9150</b>

Source: Online survey (2024)

It is observed from Table 3 that 7.6% strongly disagree, 6.8% disagree, 12.8% neutral, 34.9% agree, and 38.0% Strongly Agree that every girl or boy should receive an education that teaches the knowledge, perspectives, values, issues, and skills for sustainable living in a community," had the following response rates: This came at a mean of 3.89 and a standard deviation of 1.204, showing full consensus on the part of the youth that education is a vital component for sustainable living-as was reflected in a very high percentage of positive responses. For the statement, "The present generation should ensure that the next generation inherits a community at least as healthy, diverse, and productive as it is today, the responses showed 19.5% strongly disagree, 8.3% disagree, 25.0% neutral, 18.0% agree, and 29.2% strongly agree. This gave a mean score of 3.29 with a standard deviation of 1.460, which indicates a fair level of agreement and some ambivalence on the part of the youths regarding the responsibility of the current generation in maintaining community health and diversity for the future generation.

Results for the statement "Manufacturers should discourage the use of disposables" were as follows: 7.6% strongly disagree, 8.3% disagree, 13.3% neutral, 35.7% agree, and 35.2% strongly agree. The average score is 3.83 with a standard deviation of 1.213, reflecting a positive attitude toward decreasing disposable products, thereby showing awareness among the youth about the environmental impacts of such products. Statement number four, "Overuse of our natural resources is a serious threat to the health and welfare of future generations," brought out 10.2% strongly disagree, 5.7% disagree, 10.2% neutral, 31.0% agree, and 43.0% strongly agree. With an average of 3.91, with a standard deviation of 1.292, it shows that youth highly believe

overuse of resources threatens the lives of future generations. In the statement, "We need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment," the following were noted: 7.0% strongly disagree, 8.9% disagree, 18.8% neutral, 29.7% agree, and 35.7% strongly agree. With a mean score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.220, it could be established that a greater number of youth perceived that more stringent regulatory frameworks should be established to help protect the environment.

The response rates for the statement, "Poverty alleviation is an important topic in education for sustainable development" are as follows: 5.7% strongly disagree, 8.3% disagree, 10.2% neutral, 35.2% agree, and 40.6% strongly agree. With a mean score of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 1.166, one would conclude that there is very strong agreement that addressing poverty is essential when it comes to sustainable development education. This statement "The teaching of sustainability principles should be integrated into the curriculum in all disciplines and at all levels of schooling," revealed that 7.3% strongly Disagree, 8.6% Disagree, 22.7% Neutral, 31.5% Agree, and 29.9% strongly agree. With a resulting mean score of 3.68 and a standard deviation of 1.195, there was general agreement on the inclusion of sustainability principles into the curriculum although there was a considerable amount of neutral responses. Responses to "Governments should encourage greater use of fuel-efficient vehicles" were 11.5% strongly disagree, 13.8% disagree, 12.0% neutral, 33.3% agree and 29.4% strongly agree. A mean score of 3.55 with a standard deviation of 1.343 points to the fact that there is a split on incentivizing fuel-efficient vehicles by governments, though many take a middle position. This statement, "Sustainable development will not be possible until wealthier nations stop exploiting the labor and natural resources of poorer countries", yielded the following responses: 5.7% strongly disagree, 3.1% disagree, 18.2% neutral, 35.7% agree, and 37.2% strongly agree. An average score of 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.094 shows that youth strongly believe in equity in relations between nations if sustainable development is to be achieved.

The statement "Taxes on polluters should be increased to pay for damage to communities and the environment," revealed the following: 8.3% strongly disagree, 4.4% disagree, 15.9% neutral, 39.6% agree, and 31.8% strongly agree. An average score of 3.82 with a standard deviation of 1.173 reveals that quite a significant proportion of the youth are for increased taxation on polluters as a mechanism to deal with environmental damage. Finally, Table 3 shows that 11.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that environmentally sustainable companies are more likely to be profitable over the long run, 15.9% disagreed, 47.4% were neutral, 14.1% agreed and 11.2% strongly agreed to the statement that environmentally sustainable companies are more likely to be profitable over the long run. The weighted mean of the attitude of the youth toward sustainable development goals is 3.70 with a standard deviation of 0.9150, showing that in general, the attitude of the respondents was positive toward principles of sustainability.

### SDG practices among Ghanaian youth

This section presents findings on the SDG practices among Ghanaian youth. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std. Dev.
I avoid using plastic straws at restaurants/cafes	23.2%	24.7%	26.8%	14.8%	10.4%	2.65	1.272
I bring my reusable bag for grocery shopping.	20.3%	18.8%	22.4%	15.1%	23.4%	3.03	1.447
I discard recyclable material (ex: [as] plastic bottles, newspaper, glass) separately at home	8.6%	7.0%	16.9%	25.5%	41.9%	3.85	1.275
I conserve the use of water supply at my place	6.0%	5.7%	13.8%	24.5%	50.0%	4.07	1.185

I treat people from all castes, creeds, and religions equally	8.6%	15.6%	27.3%	31.3%	17.2%	3.33	1.182
I prefer public transport rather than a private one	7.6%	3.9%	15.4%	20.1%	53.1%	4.07	1.233
I switch off electrical appliances in my home that I don't need when I am not around	6.0%	13.8%	5.7%	31.0%	43.5%	3.92	1.258
I am willing to utilize renewable energy	15.9%	20.1%	26.0%	22.9%	15.1%	3.01	1.294
I avoid using the animal skinned [animal skin] product.	8.9%	12.8%	23.2%	28.9%	26.3%	3.51	1.252
I am interested in paying more for environmentally friendly product	13.3%	14.1%	28.4%	25.8%	18.5%	3.22	1.275
I talk about environmental sustainability with my friends and family	8.9%	11.2%	33.1%	32.8%	14.1%	3.32	1.121
I participate in events (ex: [as] seminars, talks, and workshops that relate to environmental sustainability	7.3%	15.9%	30.2%	25.5%	21.1%	3.37	1.189
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>3.45</b>	<b>.8349</b>

Source: Online survey (2024)

The table data provide the possibility to identify certain trends regarding environmental behaviors and attitudes of youths, focusing on their sustainability by action. Taking the statement "They avoid taking plastic straws at restaurants or cafes", the findings show that 23.2% never avoid using plastic straws, while 24.7% do it rarely. This implies that more than half of the respondents do not practice or are not consistent with the avoidance of this dangerous environmental practice. Conversely, 10.4% of the respondents always avoid the use of plastic straws, leading to a mean score of 2.65. The standard deviation of 1.272 reflects that there is considerable variation, which in this context means that a good number of the people interviewed do indeed think about reducing plastic waste, but the majority of them would opt for plastic straws whenever they go out to eat. It was slightly more positive regarding carrying reusable bags when doing grocery shopping. The mean in this question is 3.03, which means approximately 38.5% of the respondents replied that they bring in reusable bags either often or always when going to shop. Although this is progress toward sustainable consumerism, almost 20.3% of the subjects never take a reusable bag with them, which suggests that there needs to be further improvement in the level of awareness and development of habits toward reusing plastic bags for carrying goods. The standard deviation of 1.447 puts up the variation in individual behaviors and could hint at an opportunity for educational intervention in this regard. The statement "separate recyclable materials at home and throw them away separately" received a desirably high mean of 3.85, while 41.9% of participants responded that they always do so. This finding shows that the youth are very concerned with recycling since only 8.6% reported they never separate recyclables. The fairly small standard deviation of 1.275 suggests that a majority of the respondents consistently practice responsible waste management, underlining an important aspect of their environmental consciousness. The commitment shown is good, as stated from the data on water conservation with a mean score of 4.07.

Fifty percent of the respondents always observe water conservation, while the percentage of those who

reported never doing so is very low at 6.0%. The overwhelming positive behavior here simply underlines the awareness of the scarce availability of water resources and prudent use of water management policy principles among the youths. The standard deviation of 1.185 follows a reasonable consistency in the responses, implying that water conservation is an important practice known to most in this population. In the analysis of the statement treating all people from different castes, creeds, and religions as equals has a mean score of 3.33. Out of all the respondents, though 31.3% responded that they treat others as equals often, 8.6% responded that they never do it. This indicates that a greater proportion supports equality and is receptive to it, though the standard deviation of 1.182 shows disagreements in opinions and actions. This therefore calls for further discussions and programs on the way forward to achieve social equity as well as environmental sustainability. The final statement about using public transportation rather than private travel again demonstrates a strong preference for traveling more sustainably.

The proactive attitude of the respondents shows that, on average, 4.07 specify that always preferring public transport reduces their carbon footprint emission. Few indicated they never prefer public transport, at 7.6%. With a standard deviation of 1.233, this consistency in response from the respondents about their travel preference reflects a positive trend in adopting environmentally friendly transportation habits. From the statement about putting off electrical appliances when not in use, the data show that the commitment to energy conservation is very strong. An impressive 43.5% of the respondents indicated that they always switch off electrical appliances that are not needed; hence, the mean was 3.92. In contrast, 6.0% of the participants mentioned that this is never the case, suggesting that not everyone is so particular with energy savings at home. The responses had a standard deviation of 1.258, implying that there was moderate variability in the responses. This fact supported the fact that many consistently practice energy conservation and need some more room to improve. Results on the willingness to use renewable energy showed mixed attitudes among the youth.

With an average response score of 3.01, results showed that an overwhelming 15.1% would always use renewable energy, while a small number, 15.9%, would never consider it. It would, therefore, appear that although renewable energy is of interest, well over half of the respondents, 66.0%, were undecided or only occasionally willing to take advantage of these sources of energy. The standard deviation of 1.294 further emphasizes how scattered the participants were in terms of willingness and hence means that more education and awareness drives could at least be required to further ensure commitment to renewable energy adoption. Concerning the statement on avoiding animal skin products, a mean score of 3.51 depicts a relatively good attitude towards ethical consumerism.

A large proportion of respondents to the question reported always avoiding such products at 26.3%, while only 8.9% of participants said they never avoid such products. This would tend to indicate an increased awareness of ethical issues in purchase decisions, although the standard deviation of 1.252 would indicate that there is real diversity within the participants' behaviors. This therefore underlines the need for advocacy in cruelty-free and sustainable choices regarding products that are made within the community. The findings on the interest in paying more for environmentally friendly products show that a moderate level of willingness exists among respondents.

With an average of 3.22, 18.5% of the sample always would pay more to buy such products, while 13.3% would never pay more. This can be considered a potential gap between values and purchasing behavior: while a substantial proportion of the respondents may acknowledge the importance of sustainability, they are abnormally cautious when it comes to investing money in greener options. The dispersion in responses is captured by the standard deviation value of 1.275, which means different levels of commitment to spending practices in a sustainable way within the population. The findings on discussing environmental sustainability with friends and family reveal that there is healthy activity in the discourses of sustainably relevant matters.

The mean score of 3.32 reflects that most of the respondents, or 32.8%, talk about environmental issues often. Only 8.9% had stated that they never discussed environmental issues. The openness here shows that environmental sustainability is a relevant topic within their social circles and thus can be discussed to raise more awareness and action. The standard deviation of 1.121 is relatively small, meaning most responses never deviated from the mean, hence there is an agreement among the respondents that discussing environmental issues is of essence. In this regard, the statement that attends events related to environmental sustainability

shows a positive trend at a mean score of 3.37.

A total of 46.6% of respondents reported participating often or always in such events, while only 7.3% claimed never to do so. This shows a very great commitment to the involvement of the community in addressing issues on sustainability, and this should trickle down to bringing about more awareness and inducing collective actions. The standard deviation of 1.189 indicates variability in the rate of participation, meaning that while large numbers of the youth are actively involved, there is an opportunity to engage more people. Overall, it seems from the findings that young people are reasonably committed to nearly all aspects of environmental sustainability; they have especially good practices concerning energy conservation and actively discuss sustainability issues. However, there is still room for growth in renewable energy adoption, ethical consumerism, and financial willingness to invest in sustainable products. These can be used in formulating effective strategies for raising environmental awareness and encouraging further action among the young.

### Relationship between awareness, attitude, and practices of the youth towards SDGs

The study used Pearson’s correlation to estimate the relationship between the awareness, attitude, and practices of the youth towards SDGs. The findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Relationship between awareness, attitude, and practice among the youth toward SDGs

		Awareness	Attitude	Practices
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.860**	.481**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	384	384	384
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	.860**	1	.487**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	384	384	384
Practices	Pearson Correlation	.481**	.487**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	384	384	384

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This correlation matrix gives the idea of the association between knowledge, attitude, and practices on environmental sustainability. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated and all the correlations are significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation between awareness and attitude is 0.860, indicating an extremely strong positive correlation. That is to say, a high level of environmental awareness among people would relate closely to very good attitudes toward environmental sustainability. The significance value,  $p = 0.000$ , implies this relationship is not by chance and calls for raising the level of awareness to instill favorable attitudes.

The correlation between awareness and practices is 0.481, indicating that it shows a moderately positive relation. While there is a contribution of awareness to sustainable practices, the correlation is weaker compared to awareness and attitude. This clearly shows that even as awareness about environmental issues increases the possibility of indulging in sustainable practices, other factors may make individuals not necessarily translate their awareness into action. The significance is  $p = 0.000$ , hence reliable. Also, the relationship between attitude and practice is, which also represents a moderately positive relationship. That infers that a positive attitude towards environmental sustainability ensures a greater likelihood of practices being in tune with the same, though the strength of the relationship is less as compared to the relationship between awareness and

attitude. The significance level ( $p = 0.000$ ) reinforces the validity of this relationship. In other words, the matrix reveals that while awareness and attitude are highly related to each other, both have a fairly moderate effect on practices; this shows that developing environmental awareness and positive attitudes are necessary but insufficient to ensure the occurrence of sustainable behaviors.

## DISCUSSION

The findings show that the youth of Ghana are somewhat aware of and conversant with the SDGs. The findings affirm what has been found in previous studies. For example, Ahamad and Ariffin (2018) and Balakrishnan et al. (2020) observed increased awareness of SDGs among the youth in Malaysia. Al-Nuaimi and Al-Ghamdi (2022) also reported that the youth have an enhanced awareness level of SDGs. However, the findings contradict that of Ismail et al. (2022) and Zamora-Polo et al. (2019) who concluded that university students who were also in their youthful age had low awareness levels of the SDGs. The findings show that the youth of Ghana are aware of and conversant with the SDGs. The data from this study help to illustrate that the majority of the respondents are well-versed in key concepts such as intergenerational equity, social justice, economic and environmental sustainability, the importance of education, gender equality, and cultural diversity. It could be inferred that Ghanaian youths are knowledgeable about the general principles of sustainable development. With high awareness of all of these goals, variations in the level of responses across the various aspects of SDGs do suggest that some areas may require emphasis more than others. For example, while most are aware of balancing economic, social, and environmental factors, fewer showed strong awareness of more specific details, such as cultural diversity and the need for sustainable consumption habits. The generally positive responses thus hint at an enormous potential for young people to be engaged in the sustainable development process, especially if those programs can be suitably adapted to further strengthen their understanding in areas not that well known (Sumberg et al., 2020). The higher level of awareness forms a better ground for policymakers and educators to then construct outreach programs targeted towards increasing details in the message within areas such as biodiversity conservation, human rights, and gender equality to make the attitude of youth towards sustainability more wholesome. This generally suggests a good level of awareness with an opportunity to increase knowledge and, more so, engagement in areas that will represent practical applications of the SDGs for potentially better participation of Ghanaian youth in national and global sustainability efforts.

The findings in Table 3 show that the Ghanaian youth have overall positive attitudes towards the SDGs—meaning positive overall support for sustainability-related initiatives. Most believe in the importance of education that promotes sustainable living, and a significant majority agree that the overuse of natural resources poses threats to future generations. The alleviation of poverty in education for sustainable development and the need for more strict environmental regulations are also felt strongly by the respondents. Yet, a fair amount of variation across the responses by statement can be observed. Whereas general attitudes toward basic SDG tenets such as education, resource conservation, and poverty alleviation are generally positive, the statements that make sustainability part of all levels of education or have the government encourage fuel-efficient vehicles are more neutral. Further, the somewhat lower level of agreement regarding the profitability of environmentally sustainable companies may indicate that some persons do not yet equate sustainability with economic viability in the longer term. Overall, these findings suggest that while the Ghanaian youth are largely supportive of sustainability initiatives, they differ in the level of their understanding—especially regarding the economic benefits of sustainability and education for all sectors. The findings further point toward a set of attitudes that create opportunities for both policymakers and educators to do even more in engaging the youth by responding to gaps in understanding and reinforcing the practice of sustainability in everyday life.

The results on practices indicate that this is a sphere of very diverse engagement in environmentally sustainable behaviors. Similar to what was observed by Ahamad and Ariffin (2018), whereas there are practices related to the conservation of water and the use of public means of transportation that are more vividly and more often adopted, other areas, such as avoiding plastic straws or paying more for environment-friendly products, present lower levels of engagement. This may be indicative that some sustainable practices, whether by social norms, habit, or infrastructural reasons, are more entrenched or easy to carry on with, while

others may be resisted out of convenience or economic reasons. For example, the relatively higher adoption of water conservation and public transportation may indicate that these actions are perceived to be easier to make and/or more effective. The infrastructure of public transportation and social emphasis on water conservation could support these behaviors. However, practices that require greater personal adjustment or financial cost in their action, including renewable energies and avoiding animal skin products, also consistently receive a moderate level of engagement. Overall, the findings suggest that the general attitude exists to engage in sustainable behaviors, though the actual practical barriers, convenience, and breaking existing lifestyle habits play a great part in the determination of which practices are adopted consistently. Efforts to increase the uptake of sustainable practices may therefore need to focus on making these behaviors more convenient, economically viable, and integrated into daily routines.

The correlation matrix brings to light a couple of useful insights about awareness, attitude, and practices relating to environmental sustainability. The strong association between awareness and attitude does suggest that the more aware a person becomes about issues in the environment, the greater the chances of his or her adopting favorable attitudes toward sustainable development. It hence indicates that awareness-raising through education and advocacy might prove an effective means to shape public opinion and garner support for projects in sustainable development. Where attitudes and awareness are closely related, the relation with practices is moderate; this implies that knowledge and a positive attitude are not necessarily followed by action. This reflects a familiar problem with environmental behavior that is often referred to as the "attitude-behavior gap" (Park and Lin, 2020). People may be aware of a problem and may hold favorable attitudes, yet they do not act in an environmentally sustainable way (Park and Lin, 2020). This would be in disequilibrium and suggest that convenience, economic considerations, or lack of infrastructure are some other impediments to the translating of awareness and attitude into environmentally friendly behaviors.

The findings of this study reflect that of Mahat et al. (2017) who found that extensive environmental knowledge does not translate into more favorable environmental activities. However, the results contradict a study conducted by Barloa et al. (2016) on solid waste management, which revealed that respondents with higher environmental knowledge levels were more inclined to demonstrate good practices. In this study, youth with a high degree of knowledge are likely to engage in moderate and poor practice rather than high practice of SDGs. Jamilah et al. (2011) further asserted that a high degree of knowledge among individuals does not guarantee the implementation of favorable sustainable practices. Thus, Ghanaian youths may have information about the SDGs but lack the inclination to translate it into practice. They may lack the impetus to convert knowledge into practical applications (Moh and Manaf, 2013). Prestin and Pearce (2010) suggest that certain individuals may possess a limited comprehension that prevents them from effectively connecting the advantages of recycling with the repercussions of failing to recycle. Concurrently, some individuals may be unaware of the impact that making sustainable choices, such as the minor act of declining plastic drinking straws, can have on the sustainability of the environment. Ahmad et al. (2010) contended in another study that certain environmental acts, such as conserving energy or minimizing domestic trash, can be performed as habitual practices without necessitating environmental knowledge. Jans (2021) and Sockhill et al. (2022) noted that a good environmental mindset does not effectively convert into pro-environmental behaviors. Ahmad and Ariffin (2018) explained that lack of time, indifference towards the environment, habitual non-engagement, and discomfort, in addition to low awareness and inadequate knowledge of sustainable behaviors, contribute to the gap between SDGs awareness, attitude, and practices. Polonsky et al. (2012) asserted that as consumers acquire increased information on environmental issues, they are inclined to modify their attitudes and subsequent behaviors by their newly acquired knowledge. The enhancement of public awareness can lead to behavioral modifications. The simultaneous dissemination of extensive information on sustainable consumption will prompt customers to modify their behaviors, so reducing their environmental effect and fostering sustainable consumerism.

The modest relationship between attitude and practice further underscores the multi-factorial nature of promoting sustainable behaviors: while attitudes are an important first step, action requires pragmatic, accessible solutions to enable the youths to implement sustainable options in their daily life. This would include policy interventions, social incentives, and infrastructural changes that make it more viable for people to undertake environmentally responsible practices. Overall, the findings suggest there is a need for a multilevel approach toward environmental sustainability, one that not only raises awareness and shapes

attitudes but also takes into account the structural and contextual factors that facilitate sustainable practices.

## CONCLUSION

This study recognized the essential role that today's youth play in the achievement of the SDGs. Consequently, the study examined the youth's perspective on the SDGs in terms of awareness, attitude, and practice. The study adopted the quantitative research approach and gathered data from 384 respondents. The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The study has pointed out that there is a statistically significant relationship among awareness, attitude, and practices related to sustainable development. While there was a generally high level of awareness and a positive attitude, turning these into consistent sustainable practices remains an uphill task. The results show that people want to act environmentally, but in real life, convenience, cost, and lifestyle get in the way of fully acting on sustainability. This therefore suggests that future work should focus on infrastructure, education, and policy improvements to make sustainable choices more convenient and accessible to people. Only by removing these barriers can we bridge the gap between knowledge and action, ultimately fostering an environmentally conscious and sustainable society.

The study's findings have led to the formulation of several recommendations aimed at enhancing sustainable practices among individuals. First and foremost, we need to implement robust educational campaigns that not only raise awareness but also instill in people the importance of making life changes and adopting sustainable behaviors. There is a need to initiate practical modules on sustainability in the educational curriculums of schools, universities, and community programs, demonstrating how people can make small yet effective changes. Second, incentives from governments and policymakers would go a long way toward taming the environment. For instance, subsidies for renewable energy products, strict environmental regulations, and penalties for unsustainable behavior could be the motivating factors. Businesses can contribute by going greener and making sustainable options easier and more affordable for consumers, such as offering reusable bags or offering discounts on eco-friendly products. The final concerns to address are convenience and infrastructure. For instance, improvements in public transport systems, improved access to recycling facilities, and incentives to establish sustainable local markets might lower the threshold to a sustainable lifestyle. Encouragement of community involvement in environmental projects, like clean-up drives or workshops on sustainability, builds shared responsibility and thus further closes the gap between knowledge, attitude, and practice.

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