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NEUROEDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PERU

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the connection between education both sustainable development (ESD) and neuroeducation among first-year university students in Peru. The neuroeducation focuses on the synthesis of the cognitive and emotional processes in the learning process and ESD focuses on the consciousness, responsibility, and involvement to the environment and social problems. The importance of the understanding of the impact of neuro-educational competencies on sustainability awareness is to reinforce higher education approaches that solve complex global challenges. To explore this relationship a quantitative descriptive-correlational design was used. The sample was purposive as 370 first-year students by five Peruvian universities were selected and their data were collected. The assessment of neuroeducation dimensions (memory, thinking, emotional skills, and resilience) and sustainability competencies was performed based on a structured questionnaire, which was tested by the experts. The instrument was found to exhibit a high level of internal consistency with Cronbach alpha of 0.862 and 0.826 in neuroeducation and ESD respectively. The level of variables was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the correlation in the form of rho between neuroeducational competencies and sustainability awareness was studied by means of Spearman. The results suggest that learners tend to depict moderate to high rates of neuroeducational competencies and good understanding of the principles of sustainable development. The analysis of correlation found that there is a moderate positive correlation between neuroeducation and ESD ($r = 0.363$, $p < 0.05$): higher cognitive emotional learning capacity is related to higher sustainability awareness. These findings imply that incorporating neuroeducational strategies in higher education curriculum can enhance sustainability education in terms of cognitive, emotional, and adaptive abilities of students to handle environmental and social issues.

KEYWORDS: Neuroeducation; sustainability education; cognitive-emotional learning; emotional skills; resilience; environmental awareness; higher education students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Planetary citizenship is a term used to denote the obligation of individuals to act as members of a global community and contribute towards the well-being of not only human communities but also the natural world, that has become an important concept in discourse of sustainability (Mikalauskiene et al., 2026). It focuses on moral accountability, ecological management, and the mobilization to overcome the global issues. Climate change is however causing a severe crisis to planetary citizenship, mostly because of pollution and growing greenhouse gas emission (Mikalauskiene et al., 2026). Global warming, ozone depletion and imbalance in the ecosystem, are also threats to the environment, which not only affect ecological systems, but also have effects on how human beings think, feel and act socially. As a result, the environmental sustainability and the human development are closely linked (Leisman et al., 2026). To deal with these issues of global concerns, educational techniques are needed, but not the methods based on imparting knowledge, but rather promoting critical thinking, emotional awareness, and constructive engagement with global issues that involve sustainability.

Education plays an important role in shaping the mindset and behavior of future citizens, particularly within the framework of sustainable development (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026). Among emerging educational approaches, neuroeducation, or brain-based learning, examines the convergence of cognition and emotionality in learning, addressing memory, thinking, emotional control, and resilience (Di Salvo, 2026). Neuroeducationally, learning is not just the gathering of knowledge but the combination of mental activities, emotional participation and adaptive behavior (Arenas-Carranza et al., 2026). Through these interdependent dimensions, educators can develop learning experiences that help students build the ability to navigate complex environmental conditions and respond appropriately to societal challenges (Juarez et al., 2026).

Neuroeducation constitutes four dimensions, namely memory, thinking, emotional skills, and resilience, which form the foundation of cognitive-emotional engagement (Toomey & Lovat, 2026). Memory helps in encoding, retaining as well as retrieving knowledge especially when learning experiences are emotionally significant. (Farina et al., 2026). Thinking, which involves critical, analytical, and creative thinking, assists students in assessing complex socio-ecological systems and developing new ways to address sustainability problems.

Engagements and actions outside the classroom are made possible by emotional skills such as self-knowledge, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social competence, which raise awareness and promote responsible behavior (Jardi et al., 2026). The concept of resilience, formulated in terms of introspection, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality, guarantees persistence and adaptability in the face of adversities in the environment and society (Han & Li, 2026). All these dimensions make ESD interventions more effective, as they are connected to cognitive understanding, emotion, and behavior.

Education for sustainable development, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to environmental disasters, has evolved into a comprehensive process that fosters awareness, knowledge, values, and competencies to address challenges at the planetary scale (Kaushik et al., 2026). It highlights the incorporation of environmental, social, and economic realities into professional training and practice by providing students with assistance in cultivating the skill of sustainability. Despite global efforts, evidence suggests that over 80% of higher education institutions incorporate sustainability subjects into curricula, but fewer than 35% of students apply sustainability concepts beyond the classroom (Liu, 2026). The surveys in Peru show that 72% of students are aware of climate change, but only 41% engage in sustainability efforts at the university (Gharge & Wineman, 2026). This gap highlights the need to investigate neurocognitive and affective factors that may close the gap between knowledge and behavior, especially in the first year of university, when cognitive habits are formed, emotional regulation is practiced, and resilience is developed.

This new perspective can be addressed with a new prism created by the intersection of neuroeducation and ESD. By investigating the effects of cognitive and emotional competencies on sustainability awareness and participation, the educators can develop interventions that enhance learning outcomes and practical action. This relationship is especially important in the sphere of higher education, where learners are becoming independent and able to analyze complex social and environmental issues critically. The first-year students, especially, are of utmost importance, as this period shapes cognitive routines, mood regulation, and the ability to adjust to changes that may affect long-term commitment to sustainability programs.

The current research paper will focus on the association between neuroeducational competencies and sustainability awareness among first-year

university students in Peru. The study will use a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to examine the main dimensions of neuroeducation, including memory, thinking, emotional skills, and resilience, as well as their relationship with the engagement rates of the students with the concepts of sustainable development. This study provides an improved insight into how neuroeducational strategies can encourage sustainability education in higher education settings because it empirically analyzes the relationship between cognitive-emotional competencies and sustainability awareness.

This study contributes to the fields of neuroscience and sustainability education by bringing together theoretical knowledge and practical pedagogy. It shows that cognitive, emotional, and adaptive abilities can improve learning results and inspire environmentally conscious practice. The findings aim to inform curriculum design, instructional approaches, and interventions that enhance students' critical thinking, emotional visibility, and resilience, helping them become adaptive, responsible, and proactive members of society. Finally, this study provides a replicable model for integrating neuroeducational knowledge into sustainability education, addressing the global challenge of translating awareness into meaningful action in higher education.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Design

Table 1: Number of Students enrolled

University	Students
UNCP	1081
UPLA	2347
UC	4389
UR	1296
UTP	962
Total	10,075

Comparatively, the sample of 370 people was chosen to give a representative sample of first-year students of the five universities that were involved in the study (**Table 2**). The size was calculated by applying the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for finite population that gives the recommended sample sizes given different populations to avoid a statistically unreliable finding. In the case of the population of 10,000 or more students in the chosen universities, the sample of 370 will guarantee that the confidence level of 95% with a 5 % margin of error.

Table 2: Sample Questionnaire Application

University	Students
UNCP	40
UPLA	86

The research method used in this study was quantitative research to investigate the association between neuroeducation and education to sustainable development among students in universities. The descriptive-correlational research design was used to determine patterns, levels, and the relationship between the variables in the study. This design enabled the researchers to explain the current state of neuroeducational competencies and sustainability awareness as well as establish the strength and the direction of the association between this and that variable.

2.2. Population and Sample

The overall number of students in the five universities amounted to 10,075. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table to calculate the size of a sample, the minimum amount of 370 participants was needed to attain a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error (**Table 1**). The method used in this study is purposive (non-probability) sampling where the first-year students were chosen based on their traits that related to neuroeducation and sustainability learning. Purposive sampling was selected because respondents must have been exposed to academic programs where neuroeducational and ESD concepts were applicable in recent times. In addition, this method allows drawing specific insights, but on the other hand, it leads to constraints in the generalizability, because the sample might not be representative of the general student population.

The research used purposive, non-probability sampling that enabled the researcher to choose the participants, and the sample was limited to first-year students since they were the ones with relevant answers on the study topic, as far as their cognitive-emotional capabilities and the awareness of sustainable development were concerned. The method guarantees that the gathered information is directed and informative and provides legitimate findings on the overlap of neuroeducation and sustainability competencies.

UC	161
UR	48
UTP	35
Total	370

2.3. Data Collection Methods

To measure the quantitative data in a standardized form and compare them among participants, a structured survey was used to gather data. The survey, in the form of a questionnaire with 32 questions about the competencies of neuroeducation and sustainable development, was carried out in online format via a secure survey platform. The invitations to the participants were done through the university email and clear guidelines given to respond to the questionnaire freely. The data collection was conducted between a period of four weeks, between February 10 and March 10, 2025, which was adequate to give the participants time to respond besides ensuring consistency in institutions.

Among all 400 students invited, 370 responded and this gave a response rate of 92.5%. The survey was conducted online in the form of the surveys allowing the respondents to complete the forms at their own comfort and reducing the influence of the administration and preserving the secrecy. The focus on honest and reflective answers, as well as the fact that no personally identifiable information was gathered, was used to safeguard the privacy. This method gave credible and consistent information about the cognitive, emotional, and adaptive abilities of the students and their knowledge and perception towards sustainable development. These data had a solid ground on further descriptive and correlational studies.

2.4. Research Instruments

An organized questionnaire was employed to determine neuroeducation competencies and education sustainable development (ESD) in the first-year university students. The questionnaire was made up of questions based on four dimensions of neuroeducation that are memory, thinking, emotional skills, resilience, and three dimensions of ESD environmental, social and economic awareness. Overall, the instrument possessed 32 items, which were rated on a five-point Likert scale (between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree)). To achieve content validity, the questionnaire was turned in to five professionals who had foundations in education, neuroscience and sustainability studies. They evaluated her items on clarity, relevance and correspondence to theoretical constructs. The experts gave feedback which was used to make changes in the wording, to minimize ambiguity and to make

sure that all the variables of the study are covered.

Internal consistency was determined by the use of Cronbach alpha which gave values of 0.862 and 0.826 in the case of neuroeducation and sustainable development respectively and was found to be good. This strict validation procedure was to assure the validity of the questionnaire to assess in an effective manner cognitive, emotional, and adaptive competencies among students, their awareness, and attitudes toward sustainable development, which would oversee a powerful instrument to examine the connection between neuroeducation and ESD in the higher education setting.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and to establish the level of neuroeducation and education variables of sustainable development. To investigate the correlation between neuroeducation competencies and sustainable development awareness, the rho correlation coefficient of Spearman was used, as this type of coefficient is suitable in cases when there is an ordinal data set based on Likert scale and there is no need to have a normal distribution. Every statistical analysis is done by using IBM SPSS statistics software (Version XX) to correctly process the data and give credible results.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to. The subjects gave informed consent, and their privacy and anonymity were ensured. The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntary participation, local laws, and the Declaration of Helsinki. There were no repercussions to dropping out.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Levels of Neuroeducation among Peruvian University Students

The analysis of neuroeducation in first-year students in five large higher education institutions across Peru showed that there was a large grade of medium-to-high cognitive and emotional engagement. As indicated in **Table 3**, medium-level neuroeducation was the most common in UNCP (52%), UPLA (29%), UC (41%), and UTP (39%). Markedly high scores were observed in UPLA (71%),

UC (59%), UTP (61%), and UR (55%) which means that quite an impressive percentage of students already have high levels of cognitive and emotional abilities, which are quite crucial to successful learning and adjustment to the academic process. The

percentage of students of the low level was low (0.5%). The best percentage of students with the highest neuroeducation level was UPLA (70.59%), and UNCP (51.95%).

Table 3: Levels of Neuroeducation by University

University	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
UNCP	1.30	51.95	46.75
UPLA	0.00	29.41	70.59
UC	0.00	40.69	59.31
UR	2.63	42.11	55.26
UTP	0.00	38.98	61.02
Total	0.5	41.4	58.1

The total distribution across all universities as in **Table 4** indicates that 41.4% of students were in the medium level and 58.1% in the high level with only 0.5% in the low level. The overall preparedness of first-year students to be involved into complex learning activities involving the use of integrated cognitive-emotional processes is justified in Table 4. The findings indicate that students already have a background of critical thinking, metacognition and self-regulation, which are some of the core aspects of neuroeducation. Luperdi et al. (2025) suggest that a

learned interaction between cognition and emotion is the basis of a student being able to monitor the learning process on a self-reflective level and to adjust to the new academic challenges. The trends observed point to the premature introduction of neuroeducational principles in the university curricula, which shows the possibility of improving the lifelong learning process, problem-solving skills, and adaptive behaviors in the academic and social spheres.

Table 4: Overall Levels of Neuroeducation

Level	Frequency	Percent
Low	2	0.5
Médiun	153	41.4
High	215	58.1
Total	370	100.0

3.2. Education for Sustainable Development: Levels and University Comparisons

In contrast to the neuroeducation variable, the education assessment of sustainable development showed a very high level of understanding among first-year students in overwhelming numbers. **Table 5** indicates the percentage of education levels of sustainable development by the students in the five universities. ESD was rated as high in a majority of students with the overall percentage of 91.9. In 8.1% of the participants, the medium level was seen, and not one student scored at the level of low.

The consistently high understanding of sustainability across universities underscores the

need to integrate education in sustainable development into academic programs, facilitated by curriculum efforts that focus on environmental literacy, civic participation, and responsible action. Students' understanding encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to address climate change, promote biodiversity, and foster social innovation. When compared with neuroeducation results, the findings indicate a synergistic effect: students with better cognitive and emotional abilities are more likely to learn sustainability concepts, preparing them to engage in reflective, active learning of global issues.

Table 5: Levels of Education for Sustainable Development by University

University	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
UNCP	0.00	10.39	89.61
UPLA	0.00	3.92	96.08
UC	0.00	8.97	91.03
UR	0.00	13.16	86.84
UTP	0.00	3.39	96.61
Total	0.0	8.1	91.9

3.3. Neuroeducation Dimensions and Their Correlation with Sustainable Development

The specific analysis of the neuroeducation dimensions as memory, thinking, emotional skills, and resilience demonstrated the dominant medium-to-high scores in all indicators. In the case of memory, 38.9% of the students achieved medium level and 60% high levels of the test, which indicates the capability of the students to encode, store and recollect information. Thinking skills, such as critical, analytical, and creative skills were rated as medium by 33.8% of students and high by 64.6% of students.

The emotional skills such as self-knowledge, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication were at medium and high levels of 33.8% and 64.6% respectively. Introspection, independence, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality, which comprise the scale of resilience, had a medium level of 36.0 and high level of 63.2. These findings demonstrate that the majority of students demonstrate high cognitive, emotional, and adaptive competence, which creates the basis of learning and interaction with more intricate academic and social issues (Table 6).

Table 6: Neuroeducation Dimensions

Dimensions	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Memory	1.08	38.92	60.00
Thinking	1.62	33.78	64.59
Emotional skills	1.62	33.78	65.59
Resilience	0.81	35.95	63.24

To further assess the relationship between neuroeducation and education sustainable development (ESD), the Rho correlation coefficient of Spearman was used. The general correlation was positive and moderate between neuroeducation and ESD ($r = 0.363$, $p < 0.01$). The assessment of each of the neuroeducation dimensions revealed the strongest correlation of thinking with ESD ($r = 0.406$), secondly was resilience ($r = 0.399$), emotional skills ($r = 0.371$), and memory ($r = 0.348$) (Table 7). These findings suggest that the more cognitive, emotional, and adaptive competences higher the level of knowledge about the principles of sustainability. The

data indicate that the patterns may be stably observed in all the dimensions, and all of them have moderate positive relationships, which confirms the assumption that various elements of neuroeducation, including critical thinking, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and resilience, are associated with the understanding of sustainable development among the students. Although there are moderate correlations, it is possible to state that it supports the presence of a significant relationship between neuroeducational competencies and sustainability awareness in the first-year university students.

Table 7: Spearman's Rho Correlation Between Neuroeducation Dimensions and Education for Sustainable Development

Dimensions	Spearman's Rho	Correlation Level
Memory	0.348	Moderate
Thinking	0.406	Moderate
Emotional skills	0.371	Moderate
Resilience	0.3999	Moderate
Overall Neuroeducation	0.363	Moderate

4. DISCUSSION

According to this research, the neuroeducation levels of first-year students in Peru are medium-high as the respondents show a high level of utilization of cognitive and emotional learning processes that define successful academic outcomes. These findings indicate that such students have underlying abilities in memory, thinking, emotional abilities as well as resilience that are vital in dealing with intricate learning exercises and adjusting to learning obstacles. These skills can be compared to the past studies that identify the importance of the emotion-cognition interaction in promoting problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptive learning (Luperdi et al., 2025).

Similarly, students proved to be very sensitive and knowledgeable on sustainable development concepts. The majority of the participants had opportunities to be aware of environmental, social, and ethical responsibilities, which means that they are ready to address sustainability issues. The comparison of the neuroeducational competencies and ESD implies that those students with well-developed cognitive, emotional, and adaptive competencies are more likely to understand the issues of sustainability and are more inclined to involve themselves in them. This association puts emphasis on the need to incorporate neuroeducation approaches into sustainability-based curriculums

that can advance reflective learning and apply knowledge to responsible actions.

The analysis of neuroeducation dimensions showed consistent and average or high levels of memory, thinking, emotional skills, and resiliency. Memory aids the process of encoding, storage and retrieval of knowledge especially in learning that is emotionally viable. Thinking is applied in critical, analytical, and creative thinking, which helps students to evaluate complicated socio-environmental problems. The emotional skills such as self-awareness, empathy, motivation and social competence enable them to deal with each other efficiently and resilience helps one to be adaptive and persistent to challenges. The combination of these competencies offers the platform of reflective learning and informal decision-making when it comes to a situation related to sustainability.

The analysis of Rho by Spearman proved the existence of a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.363$) between neuroeducation and ESD, which means that higher-order cognitive-emotional development is linked with improved comprehension and involvement in sustainability. This association is further supported through dimension-specific correlations with thinking and resilience having slightly higher associations. These findings highlight the importance of cognitive-emotional capabilities of students as keys to developing long-term behaviours and knowledgeable involvement in social and environmental programs.

These findings have important implications to the higher education in Peru. Combining neuroeducation with sustainability education may equip students to be fit academically, socially, and cognitively towards being environmentally sensitive citizens. The curricula that focus on critical thinking, emotional regulation, adaptive skills, and problem-solving in the context of sustainability have the potential to improve students and their ability to engage in reflective learning. In addition, emotional intelligence and resilience can help students overcome adversity, make ethical judgments and engage in environmental and social activities, thus becoming active responsible citizens.

In spite of the general positive findings, the moderate correlation indicates the necessity of the pedagogical interventions that would directly connect the neuroeducational practices with sustainability education. Longitudinal research might be used to address the growth of these competencies over university education, whereas qualitative research might investigate the application of these abilities in practice by students. The higher

education institutes can empower students to be responsible and respond positively to complex environmental problems by developing specific courses that combine memory, critical thinking, emotional dexterity, and resilience to facilitate the process.

To conclude, the cognitive, emotional, and adaptive abilities of the first-year students give a solid basis through which they can reflectively learn and be engaged in the sustainability issues. The positive relationship that is set between neuroeducation and ESD shows the possibility and need of comprehensive interventions that can promote the relationship between these competencies and sustainability education. These approaches can produce strong, understanding, and active graduates who can make a difference.

5. CONCLUSION

This study develops a moderate positive relationship between neuroeducation and education to sustainable development (ESD) among first-year university students in Peru. These results indicate that neuroeducational processes lead to cognitive, emotional, and adaptive competencies, which help learners gain awareness of sustainability and their involvement in the environmental and social roles. Neuroeducation with ESD can be used as the basis of the creation of reflective, socially responsible, and flexible learners in higher education. These competencies are facilitated by memory, thinking, emotional, and resilience, which allow individuals to be able to retain knowledge effectively, solve problems, manage their emotions and be flexible. These processes, when linked to sustainability education, increase the ability of students to internalize values and translate them into real-life situations.

The results carry significant policy implications because universities are able to create curriculum that takes into consideration neuroeducation-based approaches to enhance sustainability participation. Teachers can create interventions that advance cognitive-emotional abilities related to environmental and social problems that would promote responsible behavior and sound decision-making. Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to track the development of neuroeducational and sustainability competencies throughout academic careers of students. Qualitative research can give a clue on how these competencies can be applied into tangible sustainability practices. The generalizability of the findings could be also confirmed with the help of cross-cultural studies and

the application of evidence-based strategies in education.

To conclude, neuroeducation and sustainability education are complementary to each other in high

learning institutions to provide a way of producing knowledgeable students with emotional awareness and the ability to make a significant contribution to sustainable development and social responsibility.

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