

Exploring Experts' Perspectives on the Field and Phenomenon of Myths in and About Sustainability Education: A Problem-centered, Podcast-based Interview Study

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Background & Relevance

- **Relevance:** Growing importance of the hot topics: sustainability education (e.g., Macintyre et al., 2025) and educational myths (e.g., Christodoulou, 2014; de Bruyckere et al., 2020)
- **Research Gaps:** The field and phenomenon of myths in and about sustainability education (MYTHSE) remain largely unexplored with multiple research gaps (Miles, 2017) unaddressed (Siegel, i.p.)
- **Object of Research:** MYTHSE, i.e., a) misconceptions b) about teaching and learning phenomena concerning sustainability that are c) widespread, d) often persistent, however e) not backed by research and (scientific) evidence (Lilienfeld et al., 2010; Sinatra & Jacobson, 2019; Siegel, i.p.)
- **Examples:**
 - Sustainability (education) has nothing to do with me and my subject area (e.g., refutation by Sterling, 2012)
 - The higher educated people are, the more they act sustainably (e.g., refutations by Berry, 1987; Orr, 1994)

Overall Research Objectives

- This study aims to explore the emerging field of myths in and about sustainability education (MYTHSE), examining their characteristics, causes, consequences, and strategies for addressing them.
- Developing a research agenda (Zawacki-Richter & Anderson, 2014) with multiple studies for generating evidence on the field and phenomenon of MYTHSE
- Create an SE-Mythology, i.e., a collection of MYTHSE and their refutations (e.g., Lilienfeld et al., 2010)

Methods

Data Collection

- Pre-registered, problem-centered, podcast-based qualitative interview study (Döringer, 2021; Witzel & Reiter, 2012) currently 7 international experts in among others sustainability education, cognitive psychology, and misinformation research

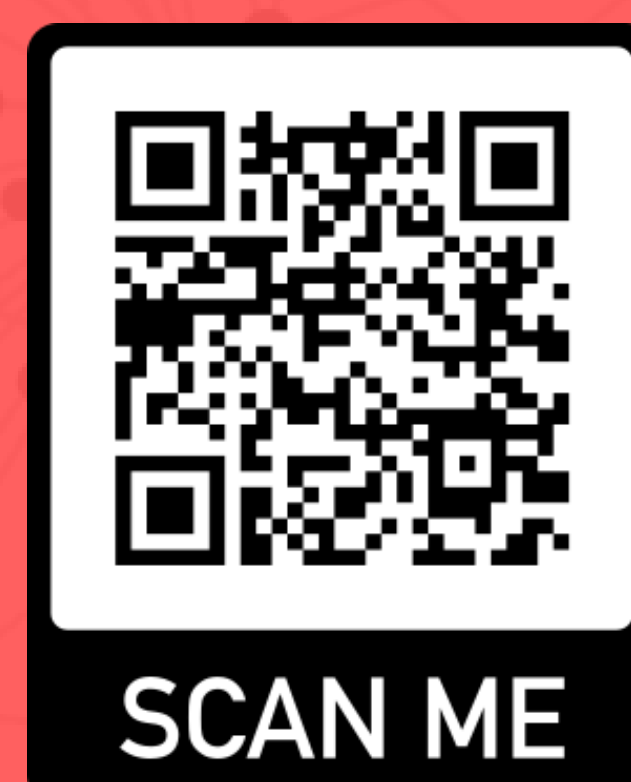
International Experts from Different Disciplines Agree:

Myths in and about Sustainability Education (MYTHSE)

- Have Various Causes
- Are Prevalent
- Can Do Harm
- Should Be Challenged



Listen to the Podcast



<https://sustainabilityeducation.captivate.fm/>



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Data Analysis

- Qualitative content analysis, employing a mix of inductive and deductive coding to identify recurring themes (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023)

Preliminary Results

- Diverse expert perspectives on the nature of MYTHSE
- Experts point to the importance of investigating MYTHSE but also significant conceptual, methodological, and practical challenges.
- Causes of MYTHSE include e.g., cognitive biases, logical fallacies, and cultural narratives, i.e., *foundation myths*.
- Detrimental consequences of MYTHSE, such as perpetuating ineffective teaching practices and/or resistance to integrating sustainability into curricula.
- Strategies addressing MYTHSE include enhancing educational research, improving (teacher) education, and fostering mental immunity (Norman et al., 2024) and critical thinking in educators and learners.

Discussion

- Despite its limitations (e.g., cross-sectional study, selective sample), this study underscores the importance of addressing MYTHSE as an own research agenda (Zawacki-Richter & Anderson, 2014).
- Experts advocate for moving beyond debunking myths toward prebunking, i.e., inoculation strategies (van der Linden, 2023) that cultivate resilience against misinformation.
- The findings call for a systematic taxonomy of MYTHSE (which is part of another study and work in progress, rigorous educational research, and professional development.

Selected References

- De Bruyckere, P., Kirschner, P. A., & Hulshof, C. (2020). *More urban myths about learning and education: Challenging eduquacks, extraordinary claims, and alternative facts*. Routledge.
- Döringer, S. (2021). 'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777>
- Macintyre, T., Tilbury, D., & Wals, A. E. J. (2025). *Education and learning for sustainable futures: 50 years of learning for environment and change*. Routledge.
- Norman, A., van der Linden, S., & Johnson, L. (2024). *Do Minds Have Immune Systems?* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 4685199). Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4685199>