Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

RJAH

https://doi.org/10.58256/2z1g2d81

REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism*

The role of strategic foresight in overcoming environmental sustainability challenges: A social framework based on discourse analysis for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Environmental sustainability in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is often discussed through the language of policy, investment, regulation, and technological transition. These dimensions are necessary, but they are not sufficient. Sustainability also depends on how institutions imagine the future, how they make environmental challenges socially meaningful, how they legitimate difficult choices, and how they invite citizens, associations, universities, companies, and local communities to act. This article develops a humanized discourse-analytical account of the role of strategic foresight in overcoming environmental sustainability challenges in Saudi Arabia. It argues that strategic foresight should not be treated simply as prediction, scenario writing, or long-term planning. It is also a communicative practice through which possible futures are narrated, risks are prioritized, responsibilities are distributed, and collective action becomes thinkable. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, the discourse-historical approach, legitimation theory, stakeholder theory, environmental communication, and foresight studies, the article proposes a social framework that connects five pillars: future-oriented environmental awareness, institutional legitimacy and trust, stakeholder voice and participation, actionable environmental communication, and feedback-based learning. The article is conceptual and methodological rather than a report of completed corpus findings. It offers a framework for analyzing public texts produced by Saudi environmental associations and sustainability institutions and for designing clearer, more participatory, and more action-oriented environmental discourse. The contribution is to show that environmental sustainability is not only a technical transition; it is also a discursive and social transition that requires legitimacy, voice, trust, and practical calls to action.

KEYWORDS: strategic foresight, environmental sustainability, discourse analysis, Saudi Arabia, environmental communication, stakeholder voices, legitimacy, calls to action, social framework

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 7, Issue 2, 2026

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 09 **May 2026**

Accepted: 29 **May 2026**

Published: 19 **June 2026**

HOW TO CITE

Alqahtani, S. F., & Wani, N. H. (2026). The role of strategic foresight in overcoming environmental sustainability challenges: A social framework based on discourse analysis for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 7(2). https://doi.org/10.58256/2z1g2d81

Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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1. Introduction

Environmental sustainability has become one of the defining questions of contemporary governance. It is usually discussed through policy targets, infrastructure projects, environmental regulation, green finance, energy transition, biodiversity protection, water security, and climate adaptation. These matters are essential. No society can meet environmental challenges through discourse alone. Yet it is equally true that environmental transformation cannot be achieved through technical plans alone. Public institutions, environmental associations, universities, companies, municipalities, and communities must also learn how to speak about the future in ways that build trust, explain risk, distribute responsibility, and invite participation. Environmental action therefore depends not only on what is planned, but also on how the plan is narrated, justified, translated into everyday duties, and made socially credible.

This issue is particularly important in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is undergoing a broad national transformation in which environmental sustainability is increasingly connected to economic diversification, urban development, quality of life, technological innovation, and social participation. Academic work on sustainability in Saudi Arabia has already shown that national development visions create new opportunities for linking environmental goals with social change, but also that successful sustainability requires stakeholder participation and credible assessment mechanisms (Alshuwaikhat & Mohammed, 2017). Research on Saudi environmental media discourse has also shown that sustainability is not only a policy field but a communicative field in which action, national identity, risk, and interdiscursivity are constructed through language (Almaghlouth, 2022). These studies make one point clear: environmental sustainability in Saudi Arabia is not only an environmental issue. It is also a social, linguistic, institutional, and future-oriented issue.

The present article enters this debate by bringing together two approaches that are often treated separately: strategic foresight and discourse analysis. Strategic foresight is concerned with alternative futures, long-term risk, uncertainty, preparedness, and the capacity of institutions to anticipate change (Inayatullah, 2008; Vecchiato & Roveda, 2010; Rohrbeck & Schwarz, 2013). Discourse analysis, by contrast, examines how language constructs social reality, forms identities, distributes agency, and legitimates action (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). When combined, these approaches help explain not only what environmental future is imagined, but how that future is made persuasive, actionable, and socially shared.

The central argument of this article is that environmental sustainability challenges in Saudi Arabia require a foresight-based discourse framework. Strategic foresight can identify possible futures and emerging risks, but discourse analysis can show how those futures are linguistically and socially organized. A future that is not narrated clearly may remain abstract. A risk that is not communicated responsibly may either be ignored or exaggerated. A call to action that does not identify who should act, why action matters, and what practical steps are possible may remain symbolic. For this reason, the article treats sustainability discourse as a bridge between long-term environmental planning and everyday social participation.

The article develops this argument in several stages. It first identifies the research problem and questions. It then reviews literature on Saudi sustainability, strategic foresight, environmental communication, legitimacy, stakeholders, and calls to action. The theoretical framework combines critical discourse analysis, the discourse-historical approach, legitimation theory, stakeholder theory, and foresight thinking. The methodology presents a qualitative discourse-analytical design that can be applied to public texts issued by environmental associations and related institutions. The analysis and discussion then elaborate how legitimacy, stakeholder voices, future-risk framing, and calls to action can be examined in Saudi environmental discourse. Finally, the article proposes a five-pillar social framework for integrating strategic foresight and discourse analysis in support of environmental sustainability in Saudi Arabia.

2. Research Problem

The research problem is both practical and methodological. Practically, environmental sustainability initiatives depend on public understanding, trust, and participation. Policies may set targets, but people need to understand why those targets matter, who benefits from them, what forms of participation are expected, and how environmental responsibility becomes part of ordinary life. Without this social dimension, sustainability language may remain distant, technical, or decorative. A campaign may speak about protection, conservation, or quality of life, but if it does not connect these words to everyday practice, it may not generate sustained

action.

Methodologically, the problem is that much environmental work is studied through policy analysis, economic planning, technological transition, or impact assessment, while the discursive conditions of sustainability remain less visible. Environmental challenges are often framed as matters of implementation, finance, regulation, or infrastructure. These are important, but they do not fully explain how people are addressed as participants, how institutions claim legitimacy, how risks are made urgent without producing fear, and how future-oriented visions become socially meaningful. Environmental communication research has repeatedly shown that public engagement depends on framing, trust, emotion, and the design of messages (Moser, 2010; Nerlich et al., 2010; Wibeck, 2014). Yet the relationship between foresight and discourse remains underdeveloped in many sustainability discussions.

Strategic foresight literature provides tools for thinking about alternative futures and uncertainty, but it does not always analyze the language through which futures are communicated to communities. Discourse analysis provides tools for examining language, power, legitimacy, and representation, but it does not always connect environmental discourse to long-term foresight and scenario thinking. This creates a gap. The field needs a framework that can ask how environmental futures are imagined, legitimated, and transformed into practical social obligations. This article addresses that gap by proposing a social framework based on discourse analysis and strategic foresight for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3. Research Questions

The article is guided by five research questions: (1) How can strategic foresight help frame environmental sustainability challenges as future-oriented social responsibilities in Saudi Arabia? (2) How can discourse analysis reveal the ways in which environmental discourse constructs legitimacy, urgency, responsibility, and collective action? (3) Which stakeholder voices are likely to be foregrounded, marginalized, or invited in Saudi environmental sustainability discourse? (4) How are calls to action formulated to move citizens, institutions, youth, volunteers, private-sector actors, and local communities from awareness to practice? (5) What social framework can integrate strategic foresight and discourse analysis to support more participatory and actionable environmental sustainability communication in Saudi Arabia?

4. Literature Review

Research on sustainability in Saudi Arabia has increasingly moved beyond narrow environmental protection and toward the relationship between national transformation, social development, and environmental responsibility. Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed (2017) examine the presence of sustainability within national development visions and argue that successful transformation requires stakeholder participation and comprehensive assessment mechanisms. Their work is useful for the present article because it shows that sustainability cannot be reduced to policy ambition; it must be tied to institutional capacity and social involvement. Almaghlouth (2022) contributes more directly to discourse analysis by examining Saudi online media discourse on environmental sustainability. Her corpus-based study highlights keyness, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and action-oriented discourse. It demonstrates that Saudi environmental communication is not simply descriptive; it actively constructs national identity, officials, responsibility, and action.

These studies provide an important starting point, but the present article shifts the focus from describing sustainability discourse to designing a framework that links discourse with strategic foresight. Strategic foresight research has shown that organizations and institutions need structured ways to think about uncertainty, weak signals, alternative scenarios, and long-term transformation (Amer et al., 2013; Bootz, 2010; Rohrbeck et al., 2015). Inayatullah (2008) describes futures thinking through multiple pillars that help move organizations beyond linear prediction. Vecchiato and Roveda (2010) show that strategic foresight is especially important when institutions face uncertainty about drivers of change and possible responses. Rohrbeck and Schwarz (2013) and Rohrbeck and Kum (2018) further demonstrate that foresight contributes value when it shapes decision-making, strategic agility, and preparedness. These studies are significant because environmental sustainability is precisely a field of uncertainty. Climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, waste generation, urban growth, and social behavior do not unfold in predictable linear ways.

Environmental discourse studies add a different but complementary perspective. Feindt and Oels (2005)

argue that discourse matters in environmental policy because policy problems are not simply given; they are constructed, negotiated, and contested. Hajer and Versteeg (2005) show that environmental politics has benefited from discourse analysis, particularly because discourse reveals how environmental problems acquire meaning in institutional contexts. Sharp and Richardson (2001) demonstrate how Foucauldian discourse analysis can reveal the assumptions and power relations embedded in planning and environmental policy. Such studies are important because they remind us that environmental sustainability is not only about facts, but also about the categories, narratives, and problem definitions through which facts become politically and socially meaningful. Media and public communication studies also show that environmental problems travel through frames, voices, and institutional routines. Carvalho (2007) demonstrates that news discourse can embed ideological cultures in the representation of climate science, while Boykoff (2007) shows how media representations of climate change can move from convergence to contention. Olausson (2009) shows that climate discourse may frame collective responsibility differently according to assumptions about scientific certainty and social action. Nisbet (2009) argues that frames matter because they make complex environmental problems understandable to publics with different values and knowledge backgrounds. These studies matter for the Saudi case because environmental discourse must speak across different audiences: policymakers, students, families, volunteers, businesses, municipalities, and local communities.

Critical discourse analysis provides the article with its broader analytical foundation. Fairclough (1992) views discourse as a social practice that links textual features with social structures, institutions, and power. Van Dijk (1993) emphasizes that critical discourse analysis examines the relationship between discourse, power, and inequality. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) add the discourse-historical approach, which is particularly valuable in national contexts because it examines how discourse draws on historical narratives, intertextuality, nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification. This article uses these insights to examine how environmental sustainability discourse may construct the nation, the future, stakeholders, risks, and obligations. Legitimacy is another key theme. Environmental associations and institutions must persuade audiences that their work is necessary, credible, moral, and useful. Suchman (1995) describes legitimacy as a generalized perception that an organization's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a social system. Van Leeuwen (2007) offers a discourse-analytical account of legitimation through authority, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. Palazzo and Scherer (2006) argue that legitimacy increasingly depends on deliberation and public reasoning, especially when organizations address controversial or socially consequential issues. Research on corporate social responsibility communication similarly shows that institutions often use reports, statements, and stakeholder-oriented messages to construct accountability and trust (Golob & Bartlett, 2007; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008). These perspectives help explain why environmental communication cannot merely state goals; it must justify them in ways that audiences recognize as legitimate.

Stakeholder theory also matters. Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that stakeholders have descriptive, instrumental, and normative importance. Mitchell et al. (1997) refine this by explaining stakeholder salience through power, legitimacy, and urgency. Bäckstrand (2006) adds that environmental governance often depends on democratic stakeholder participation, not merely expert administration. Environmental sustainability involves many stakeholders: government institutions, associations, youth, schools, universities, municipalities, companies, local communities, volunteers, donors, researchers, and future generations. Yet stakeholder presence in discourse is not neutral. Some voices may be central, while others may appear only as recipients of instructions. The article therefore asks whether environmental discourse creates real participation or only symbolic inclusion. Environmental communication research helps clarify how awareness becomes action. Moser (2010) emphasizes that climate and environmental communication face challenges of complexity, distance, uncertainty, trust, and motivation. Nerlich et al. (2010) examine the theory and language of climate communication, showing that metaphors, frames, and narratives shape public understanding. Wibeck (2014) stresses the importance of learning, communication, and engagement. Studies of environmental behavior show that knowledge alone rarely produces action; people also face social, institutional, emotional, and practical barriers (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Lorenzoni et al., 2007; Steg & Vlek, 2009). O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) argue that fear-based communication may not produce meaningful engagement. This literature is important for Saudi environmental discourse because sustainability messages must do more than name environmental problems. They must give people practical, credible, and socially meaningful ways to participate.

The gap that remains is the integration of these strands. Saudi sustainability studies highlight national transformation. Foresight studies explain future-oriented planning. CDA explains discourse and power. Legitimacy theory explains institutional credibility. Stakeholder theory explains participation. Environmental communication explains engagement. However, these areas are not always combined into a single framework that can guide the analysis and design of sustainability discourse. This article contributes by proposing such a framework for the Saudi context.

5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework rests on five connected ideas. The first is critical discourse analysis. CDA treats language not as a transparent container of information, but as a social practice. Environmental discourse can therefore be studied in terms of word choice, agency, modality, evaluation, metaphors, pronouns, imperatives, narrative structure, and intertextual links. A statement such as "we protect the environment" is not only descriptive. It constructs an actor, a moral position, a shared identity, and an implied obligation. CDA is useful because environmental sustainability discourse often appears neutral while carrying assumptions about responsibility, urgency, national development, and public duty.

The second idea is the discourse-historical approach. DHA is important because Saudi sustainability discourse is linked to national transformation, long-term development, Islamic and cultural values, modernization, community service, and future generations. Environmental messages do not appear in isolation. They draw on national narratives, institutional authority, developmental planning, and global sustainability vocabularies. DHA therefore allows the analysis to ask how environmental futures are historically situated, how stakeholders are named, what qualities are attributed to them, what arguments justify action, and how certainty or urgency is intensified or softened (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

The third idea is strategic foresight. Strategic foresight does not mean predicting the future with certainty. It means developing disciplined ways of thinking about possible futures, risks, uncertainties, disruptions, opportunities, and long-term preparedness. In sustainability discourse, foresight matters because environmental problems are rarely immediate in simple ways. Water scarcity, desertification, waste, pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate vulnerability involve delayed consequences and interconnected systems. Foresight discourse turns distant consequences into present responsibilities. It helps ask: What future are we trying to avoid? What future are we trying to build? Who must act now? What signs should we notice early? What capacities should be developed before crisis arrives?

The fourth idea is legitimation. Environmental associations and institutions must build legitimacy if they want people to participate. Legitimacy may be built through authority, such as reference to national programs or expert knowledge; through moral evaluation, such as protecting future generations; through rationalization, such as linking action to health, quality of life, biodiversity, or resource security; and through narrative, such as stories of restoration, collective responsibility, or community pride (van Leeuwen, 2007). A discourse-analytical approach makes these legitimation strategies visible.

The fifth idea is stakeholder voice. Environmental sustainability is often described as everyone's responsibility, but discourse analysis asks whether "everyone" is actually given a voice. Are citizens addressed as partners or only as targets of awareness? Are youth represented as decision-makers or as volunteers only? Are local communities treated as knowledge holders or as beneficiaries? Are future generations invoked as moral symbols or connected to concrete policies? Stakeholder theory helps identify whose interests, urgency, and legitimacy are recognized (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997). In the proposed framework, stakeholder voice is not decorative. It is a condition for sustainable social action.

6. Methodology

This article is conceptual and methodological. It does not report the results of a completed corpus analysis. Instead, it proposes a discourse-analytical framework that can be applied to a future corpus of public environmental texts in Saudi Arabia. This choice is deliberate. The purpose is to show how strategic foresight and discourse analysis can be integrated before empirical coding begins, so that future research can avoid treating sustainability discourse as a loose collection of slogans.

A future empirical study using this framework could collect a corpus from publicly available texts

produced by Saudi environmental associations, sustainability institutions, municipal initiatives, universities, environmental campaigns, volunteer organizations, and related national sustainability platforms. The corpus could include mission statements, campaign pages, volunteer invitations, environmental reports, awareness posts, speeches, strategy summaries, infographics, social media captions, and calls for participation. If the corpus is bilingual, Arabic and English versions should be analyzed separately and comparatively, since translation and language choice may reshape responsibility, urgency, and audience positioning.

Corpus design would need to be transparent. Each text should be recorded with metadata: institution, date, genre, language, platform, target audience, and whether the text is informational, promotional, instructional, reflective, or evaluative. This is important because a sustainability report, a tweet, a volunteer poster, and a strategy page do not perform the same social action. They differ in length, authority, audience, and expected response. A careful methodology should not flatten these genres into one undifferentiated corpus. Instead, it should ask what each genre allows the institution to do.

The proposed analysis would proceed in five stages. First, the researcher would define corpus boundaries: time period, institution type, language, genre, and document source. Second, texts would be coded for environmental problem framing. This includes how challenges are named: climate change, desertification, pollution, waste, biodiversity, water scarcity, urban heat, quality of life, or ecological protection. Third, the texts would be coded for foresight features: references to future generations, long-term risk, preparedness, resilience, scenarios, transformation, and future opportunity. Fourth, legitimation strategies would be analyzed using categories such as authority, moral evaluation, rationalization, and narrative legitimation. Fifth, stakeholder representation and calls to action would be analyzed, with attention to pronouns, imperatives, invitations, modal verbs, practical instructions, and the distribution of agency.

The unit of analysis is not only the sentence. Environmental discourse often operates across titles, headings, images, captions, slogan structures, hyperlinks, repetition, and institutional design. A campaign slogan may build urgency; a report title may claim expertise; a volunteer invitation may define participation; a table of achievements may construct legitimacy through measurable action. The methodology therefore treats discourse as textual, paratextual, and institutional.

The proposed coding categories include: (1) environmental challenge framing; (2) future-risk framing; (3) strategic foresight vocabulary; (4) legitimacy construction; (5) stakeholder representation; (6) responsibility attribution; (7) emotional and moral appeals; (8) calls to action; (9) evidence and accountability; and (10) feedback and learning mechanisms. These categories are intended to support qualitative interpretation rather than mechanical counting. Quantitative corpus tools could later be used to examine frequency, collocation, and keyness, but close reading remains necessary because legitimacy and action are often built through context, not isolated words.

A further methodological safeguard is reflexivity. The researcher should not begin from the assumption that every sustainability text is either sincere or empty. Environmental discourse may be aspirational, strategic, promotional, educational, or accountable, and often it is several of these at once. The aim is not to condemn institutional language, but to understand how it works, where it succeeds, and where it needs stronger links to participation and evidence.

7. Analysis and Discussion

The first analytical issue is how environmental challenges are framed as future risks. In sustainability discourse, a challenge becomes socially powerful when it is not only described as a present problem but connected to future consequences. Water scarcity is not merely a technical resource issue; it can be framed as a future risk to communities, agriculture, health, and quality of life. Waste is not merely an administrative problem; it can be framed as a future burden on cities and ecosystems. Biodiversity loss is not only the disappearance of species; it can be framed as a weakening of ecological memory, national natural heritage, and intergenerational responsibility. Strategic foresight strengthens environmental discourse by linking present action to possible futures.

However, future-risk discourse must be handled carefully. Environmental communication research has shown that fear alone is not enough to mobilize sustained action (O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). If discourse overuses catastrophe, audiences may withdraw. If it underplays risk, audiences may delay action. A foresight-

based discourse should therefore balance urgency with agency. It should say, in effect: the future contains risks, but those risks can be reduced through timely, collective, and practical action. This is where strategic foresight and discourse analysis meet. Foresight identifies the possible future; discourse gives people a place inside that future.

The second analytical issue is legitimacy. Environmental associations and institutions need to explain why they are credible actors. Legitimacy can be built through alignment with national transformation, scientific expertise, institutional partnerships, visible achievements, community service, and transparent reporting. Yet legitimacy can also become fragile if discourse remains vague. Words such as "sustainability," "green," "awareness," and "responsibility" are powerful but easily overused. If they are not linked to evidence, actions, and outcomes, they may become symbolic. This is why environmental discourse should not rely only on noble language. It should show what was done, who participated, what changed, what remains difficult, and what the next step is.

In a Saudi context, legitimacy is likely to be built through several intertwined resources: national alignment, religious and moral responsibility, scientific knowledge, community partnership, youth engagement, and contribution to quality of life. Each of these resources has communicative value. National alignment connects environmental work to broader development. Moral responsibility connects action to values. Scientific knowledge gives credibility. Community partnership builds inclusion. Youth engagement constructs the future as a living social actor. Quality of life makes environmental protection relevant to daily experience. The strongest discourse does not depend on one of these resources only. It combines them.

The third issue is stakeholder voice. Many environmental texts use collective pronouns such as "we" and "our." These pronouns can create shared identity, but they can also hide unequal agency. Who is the "we"? Is it the institution speaking to the public? Is it the nation? Is it citizens and institutions together? Is it volunteers? Discourse analysis must ask whether stakeholders are represented as active participants or passive recipients. A message that says "we must protect the environment" may sound inclusive, but it does not necessarily give people a role. A more actionable message specifies what citizens, schools, universities, municipalities, companies, and volunteers can do.

Stakeholder representation is especially important for environmental associations. Associations often depend on volunteers, donors, partnerships, and public trust. Their discourse must therefore speak with people, not only to people. A strong environmental association text may combine institutional authority with community voice. It may present expert knowledge, but also invite local knowledge. It may report achievements, but also create channels for feedback. It may call for volunteering, but also explain how volunteer action contributes to long-term outcomes. In this sense, stakeholder discourse is not merely a matter of politeness; it is part of institutional effectiveness.

The fourth issue is calls to action. Environmental discourse often fails when it stops at awareness. People may agree that environmental protection is important and still not know what to do next. A call to action should be concrete, realistic, timed, and socially meaningful. "Protect the environment" is too broad. "Join a local clean-up campaign on Saturday," "reduce single-use plastic in campus events," "register for tree-planting volunteers," "report waste dumping through this platform," or "separate recyclable material in designated areas" are stronger because they convert values into action. The language of action must reduce uncertainty.

Calls to action also need emotional balance. They should not shame people so much that they disengage. They should not flatter them so much that no change is required. Effective action discourse links personal behavior to collective impact. It makes participation feel possible, useful, and recognized. This is consistent with research showing that pro-environmental behavior depends on motivation, perceived control, social norms, infrastructure, and feedback (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Steg & Vlek, 2009). In Saudi environmental associations, calls to action can become more powerful when they connect participation to local places, family responsibility, campus life, national identity, and future generations.

The fifth issue is the risk of symbolic sustainability discourse. Many institutions now use sustainability language because it is expected. This can be positive if it reflects genuine transformation. But it can also become a form of symbolic legitimacy if the language of sustainability becomes detached from measurable practice. Discourse analysis is useful because it can identify gaps between claim and evidence. Does a text say "we are committed" without showing how commitment is enacted? Does it use future-oriented language without

specifying timelines? Does it celebrate partnership without naming partner roles? Does it invite participation without giving practical steps? Does it report success without providing indicators?

This does not mean that all broad language is empty. Visionary language has a role. Environmental movements need hope, imagination, and shared symbols. Strategic foresight itself depends on the capacity to imagine futures that do not yet exist. The problem is not aspiration. The problem is aspiration without mechanism. A foresight-based discourse should therefore move through three levels: imagined future, present responsibility, and practical pathway. It should name the desired future, explain why present action matters, and identify what stakeholders can do.

The discussion suggests that environmental sustainability communication in Saudi Arabia can become more effective if it uses strategic foresight as a way to organize discourse. Future-oriented awareness can help citizens see environmental action as a long-term responsibility. Legitimation strategies can build institutional trust. Stakeholder voices can widen participation. Calls to action can turn abstract values into practical behavior. Feedback and accountability can prevent sustainability discourse from becoming merely decorative.

8. Proposed Social Framework

The article proposes a five-pillar framework titled A Foresight-Based Discourse Framework for Environmental Sustainability in Saudi Arabia. The framework is designed for environmental associations, universities, municipalities, public campaigns, and institutional communicators who need to connect sustainability planning with public participation. It is not a rigid model. It is a practical guide for analyzing and improving discourse.

Table 1. A Foresight-Based Discourse Framework for Environmental Sustainability in Saudi Arabia

Pillar	Discourse function	Strategic foresight function	Stakeholder role	Practical application	Expected social impact
Future-oriented environmental awareness	Frames environmental issues as long-term social responsibilities rather than isolated campaigns.	Links present behavior with future risks, scenarios, and opportunities.	Citizens, students, and communities become future-aware participants.	Use public messages that explain future consequences in simple language and connect them to local action.	Greater understanding of why environmental action matters now.
Institutional legitimacy and trust	Shows why the institution or association is credible, responsible, and accountable.	Connects long-term plans with transparent reporting and evidence of progress.	Stakeholders can evaluate claims and trust repeated communication.	Report achievements, difficulties, indicators, and next steps clearly.	Reduced symbolic communication and stronger public confidence.
Stakeholder voice and participation	Represents different actors as contributors, not only audiences.	Uses foresight to identify who will be affected and who should participate.	Youth, volunteers, universities, local communities, private sector, and future generations receive identifiable roles.	Create consultation, volunteering, feedback, and partnership channels.	Broader ownership of sustainability and stronger social inclusion.
Actionable environmental communication	Turns environmental values into practical instructions and realistic behavior.	Converts future scenarios into steps that can be taken now.	Stakeholders know what to do, when to do it, and how it contributes.	Use clear calls to action: volunteer, recycle, conserve, report, learn, plant, monitor, or reduce waste.	Greater movement from awareness to practice.

Feedback, accountability, and learning	Keeps discourse connected to evidence, correction, and improvement.	Uses foresight as a learning cycle rather than a one-time vision.	Participants see that their action and feedback matter.	Publish follow-up reports, learning summaries, and revised plans.	Continuous improvement and sustained engagement.

The table brings the article's argument into an operational form. It can be used in two ways: as an analytical grid for researchers studying Saudi environmental discourse and as a practical checklist for associations and institutions that want to improve their public communication. Its main logic is simple: every sustainability message should clarify the future concern, justify the institution's role, include stakeholders meaningfully, offer practical action, and provide feedback on what happened after the message was issued.

The first pillar, future-oriented environmental awareness, prevents sustainability campaigns from becoming disconnected events. It asks communicators to explain how today's practices affect tomorrow's environment. The second pillar, legitimacy and trust, requires institutions to support their claims with evidence and transparent reporting. The third pillar, stakeholder voice, moves beyond one-way awareness and creates space for people and organizations to see themselves as contributors. The fourth pillar, actionable communication, turns values into behavior. The fifth pillar, feedback and learning, prevents campaigns from ending once the message has been circulated. It asks: What did people do? What changed? What should be improved?

The framework can also be used as a planning tool before a campaign begins. An environmental association preparing a campaign, for example, can ask five practical questions. What future risk does this campaign explain? What evidence makes the association's role credible? Which stakeholders are named as active partners? What precise action is the audience invited to take? How will the association report the result afterwards? These questions turn discourse analysis from a purely academic activity into a quality-control mechanism for public communication. They also reduce the risk of producing attractive messages that have no clear behavioral pathway.

The same framework can support evaluation after a campaign has ended. A discourse analyst can compare the campaign's language with its reported outcomes. If the campaign used strong calls to action but provided no follow-up, the feedback pillar is weak. If the campaign referred to future generations but did not identify current responsibilities, the foresight pillar is incomplete. If the campaign represented youth as symbols of the future but did not give them a participatory role, the stakeholder pillar is only partial. In this way, the model encourages a practical form of accountability. It asks institutions to align their words, roles, actions, and evidence.

Finally, the framework encourages communicators to think in layers. Public environmental discourse should not be written only for experts, nor should it be simplified to the point that it loses substance. A strong message can contain an accessible public statement, a clear explanation of the environmental issue, a link to long-term futures, a practical action, and a follow-up mechanism. This layered approach is particularly useful in multilingual and multicultural settings, where different audiences may have different levels of environmental knowledge, institutional trust, and willingness to participate.

9. Implications

The proposed framework has several implications. For environmental associations, it suggests that credibility depends on more than announcing activities. Associations should explain the future problem they are addressing, define stakeholder roles, provide evidence of action, and invite practical participation. Their discourse should be transparent about both achievements and challenges. This builds trust and makes environmental work appear socially grounded rather than symbolic.

For universities, the framework suggests that environmental sustainability should be taught and communicated as an everyday institutional practice. Students can be addressed not only as learners but as future professionals, community members, volunteers, and knowledge producers. University sustainability discourse can connect research, campus behavior, curriculum, volunteering, and community partnerships. Such discourse would turn environmental responsibility into a lived educational practice.

For policymakers and public institutions, the framework emphasizes that long-term environmental

planning requires accessible communication. Strategic foresight may be sophisticated, but if it is communicated only in technical language, it may not generate public involvement. Policy discourse should therefore include layered communication: technical documents for experts, clear public summaries for citizens, practical guides for local institutions, and participatory channels for feedback.

For discourse analysts, the article shows that strategic foresight is a valuable addition to environmental discourse analysis. It directs attention to future time, uncertainty, scenario, preparedness, and intergenerational responsibility. Conversely, discourse analysis helps foresight studies by showing how futures become persuasive through language. This relationship opens a productive research direction for applied linguistics, environmental humanities, and sustainability communication.

10. Limitations

This article has limitations. It is conceptual and methodological; it does not report a completed empirical corpus analysis. Its claims should therefore be read as a proposed analytical framework rather than as final findings about all Saudi environmental discourse. Future research should collect a clearly defined corpus from environmental associations, sustainability campaigns, university initiatives, municipal programs, and national communication platforms. Such research should compare Arabic and English texts, examine multimodal materials, and study social media interaction.

A second limitation is that discourse analysis does not measure behavioral change directly. It can show how discourse invites action, constructs legitimacy, or distributes responsibility, but it cannot prove that people changed their behavior. Future studies should combine discourse analysis with interviews, surveys, participation data, or ethnographic observation. A third limitation is that the Saudi context is internally diverse. Urban, rural, coastal, desert, university, nonprofit, and corporate sustainability discourses may differ. A future corpus should therefore avoid treating Saudi environmental discourse as one uniform voice.

11. Conclusion

Environmental sustainability in Saudi Arabia requires more than technical planning. It requires discourse that can imagine the future, legitimate action, include stakeholders, and guide practical participation. This article has argued that strategic foresight and discourse analysis should be brought together because each completes the other. Strategic foresight helps institutions think about possible futures, long-term risks, and preparedness. Discourse analysis shows how those futures are named, justified, communicated, and turned into social responsibility.

The proposed five-pillar framework—future-oriented environmental awareness, institutional legitimacy and trust, stakeholder voice and participation, actionable environmental communication, and feedback-based learning—offers a way to strengthen sustainability discourse in Saudi Arabia. It encourages institutions and associations to move beyond broad slogans and toward communicative practices that are clear, participatory, accountable, and action-oriented.

The article's central contribution is therefore simple but important: sustainability is not only a policy challenge or a technological transition. It is also a discursive social process. People must be able to understand the future being imagined, trust the institutions asking them to act, see themselves as meaningful stakeholders, and know what practical steps they can take. When environmental discourse does these things, strategic foresight becomes socially alive. It no longer remains a document about the future; it becomes a shared language for building that future.

Funding:

The author extends their appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the Project number (PSAU/2026/02/42367).

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