

DEGROWTH PEDAGOGY IN MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study addresses the research question of what constitutes the fundamental elements of degrowth pedagogy in management and business education, and how are these elements manifested across the micro, meso and macro levels. The analysis is based on an integrative literature review (n=15). The findings suggest that degrowth pedagogy is inherently oppositional and defines itself through resistance. Specifically, the study identifies the following fundamental elements of degrowth pedagogy: (1) ecocentrism and ecological literacy; (2) an understanding of the historical, value-laden and political nature of social systems; (3) critical thinking and questioning; (4) multi-paradigmatic thinking and imagination; (5) dialogue and reflection; (6) experiential and transdisciplinary learning contexts; and (7) conviviality, care and emancipatory capacities. Resistance to the growth paradigm, alongside the thinking and enactment of degrowth, emerges as a cross-cutting theme. Degrowth pedagogy remains an emerging field of study, and its relationship to related educational perspectives warrants further elaboration.

Keywords: *Degrowth, post-growth, pedagogy, management and business education, integrative review.*

1. Introduction

No evidence has been found of an absolute, sufficiently rapid, and sustained global decoupling of environmental harms from economic benefits of the kind required for ecological sustainability (Vadén et al., 2020). Consequently, the principal problem associated with perpetual economic growth lies in its inherent unsustainability (Toikka et al., 2026). The concept of degrowth challenges the dominant paradigm of green or sustainable growth by advocating political and social transformation aimed at reducing a society's throughput – that is, the flows of energy and resources into and out of the economy – while improving quality of life (Kallis et al., 2018). Degrowth is grounded in the principles of anti-capitalist thought, democratisation, justice, conviviality, sufficiency, and care (Levelt et al., 2026) and its policy proposals support three broad goals: reducing the environmental impact of human activities; redistributing income and wealth both within and between countries; and promoting the transition from a materialistic to a convivial and participatory society (Cosme et al., 2017).

This necessitates a significant transformation in operational business practices and the conceptualisation of value creation within organisations (Froese et al., 2023; Nesterova et al., 2025). Similarly, the concept of degrowth challenges and transforms the education of management and business, which has traditionally relied on growth-based strategies (Bobulescu, 2022; Laasch, 2024). Literature on degrowth or post-growth pedagogy has emerged in recent years, and it appears as a growing theme in the field of education for sustainable development. Although literature is still scarce, there is a need to synthesise the existing research on the topic in order to identify the key ideas behind the degrowth pedagogy. This study addresses the following research question: *What constitutes the fundamental elements of degrowth pedagogy in management and business education, and how are these elements manifested across the micro, meso and macro levels?*

2. Degrowth in management and business

Critiques of perpetual economic growth underpin the fields of growth-critical science, degrowth, and post-growth (Toikka et al., 2026). Degrowth seeks to address the problems inherent in the socio-economic system of capitalism – characterised by a growth-focused and linear economy – as well as the shortcomings of green growth (Levelt et al., 2026). It shares a common foundation with the closely related concepts of sufficiency and regeneration within the framework of strong sustainability, all of which emphasise systemic change (Levelt et al., 2026). While degrowth is a systems-level theory, sector-specific and piecemeal interpretations of degrowth are valuable, and degrowth research does not need to be

comprehensive or consistently oriented towards a unified paradigm, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the form that a sustainability transition may ultimately take (Toikka et al., 2026).

Literature has discussed the implications of degrowth to businesses and developed criteria to assess whether a company follows a degrowth paradigm (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018), proposed ideas on what firms should be for a degrowth economy and society to be possible (Nesterova, 2020), identified degrowth-oriented value creation patterns from existing businesses (Froese et al., 2023) and depicted what an ideal degrowth business may look like (Nesterova et al., 2025). Degrowth-oriented business, for example, deviates from profit maximization imperative and overcome economic growth dynamics, for example through real cost pricing, investing in efficiency gains without growth motives and balancing the organisational scale, value non-human life and long-term view, engage consumers for sufficiency, and rely on democratic governance and collaborative value creation (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2018; Nesterova, 2020; Froese et al., 2023; Nesterova et al., 2025). Furthermore, degrowth policy proposals' intended changes in production and consumption consist of socially useful production (i.e. reducing overproduction), democratic, not-for-profit business models, relocating economic activities, limit advertisement, lifestyles of sufficiency, and reduce waste (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). It has been acknowledged that perfect degrowth businesses do not exist in the current system (Nesterova et al., 2025).

3. Method

This study is based on an integrative literature review, a method that “reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). The literature on degrowth pedagogy remains relatively fragmented, and established frameworks are largely absent; therefore, an integrative review offers a means of clarifying and structuring this emerging field of research. A systematic search was conducted in Scopus and Web of Science using two search queries. The query “(degrowth OR post-growth) AND (education OR pedagog* OR learning)” was applied to the Title field, and the query “(degrowth OR post-growth) AND (“business education” OR “management education”)” was applied to the Abstract, Title, and Keywords fields. The review process was organised using the web-based systematic review management tool Covidence. The search queries yielded 53 articles from Scopus and Web of Science after the removal of duplicates. Following the screening of titles and abstracts, 13 irrelevant sources were excluded. Subsequent full-text screening led to the exclusion of a further 24 studies. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and review papers published in English were included, and no time restrictions were applied. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on degrowth pedagogy or education as their primary subject, or if they addressed degrowth pedagogy only within a specific context rather than in general, or solely within a business and management context. Two additional articles were excluded because they were not accessible. Consequently, a total of 15 articles were included in the review for in-depth analysis. Integrative reviews require conceptual structuring to clarify how the main concepts of the topic come together as a unified idea (Torraco, 2005). This study first provides an overview of the reviewed articles and then organises the elements of degrowth pedagogy in management and business education across three levels – macro, meso and micro – encompassing the societal, institutional and classroom-level manifestations of degrowth pedagogy. The micro-meso-macro framework is employed to capture the multi-level nature of degrowth pedagogy and the educational transformations required for its implementation.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of the reviewed articles

The reviewed articles were published between 2019 and 2026, with the majority appearing within the past three years, suggesting that the field of degrowth education and pedagogy remains relatively nascent and is still emerging. The reviewed articles can be divided into two groups based on the level of analysis on which they focus. Most studies operate at the micro and meso levels, addressing degrowth-oriented learning and teaching practices, learning environments, and the implications of degrowth for course and curriculum design (Kaufmann et al., 2019; Bobulescu, 2022; Kopnina & Bedford, 2024; Kopnina et al., 2024; Laasch, 2024; White, 2024; Kopnina et al., 2025a; 2025b; Liuzzo, 2025; Liuzzo & Tsai, 2025). Some of these studies explicitly argue for “degrowth pedagogy” or “pedagogy for degrowth” and propose frameworks or principles upon which it is based (Kaufmann et al., 2019; Bobulescu, 2022; White, 2024; Liuzzo, 2025; Liuzzo & Tsai, 2025), whereas others position degrowth as part of ecopedagogy and critical pedagogy (Kopnina & Bedford, 2024; Kopnina et al., 2024; Kopnina et al., 2025a; 2025b). Laasch (2024), by contrast, does not explicitly discuss degrowth pedagogy but instead relates degrowth to the radicalisation of management education. He refers to “disobedience pedagogy”, which draws on

existing strands of critical degrowth pedagogy but goes a step further by enabling future managers to translate their dissent from growth into forms of civil disobedience.

One-third of the studies adopt a meso- and macro-level perspective, examining degrowth education more broadly at the systemic level of institutions and society (Jones, 2021; Baldacchino & Saeverot, 2024; Selwyn, 2024; Tannock, 2025; Rudolph et al., 2026). These articles call for a fundamental rethinking of education from a degrowth perspective, examining how degrowth values and principles can inform the development of educational practices and the redefinition of educational aims (Jones, 2021; Baldacchino & Saeverot, 2024; Selwyn, 2024; Rudolph, 2026). Tannock (2025, p. 464), however, offers a distinctive perspective by adopting a critical stance towards the notion of “degrowth education”, and arguing that it offers “an essential set of questions, critiques, perspectives and proposals that educators need to engage with” but not a single overarching framework for educational reform.

4.2. Macro: Societal level analysis of degrowth pedagogy

Resisting the growth paradigm What is reflected across all the studies is that degrowth pedagogy is inherently oppositional and defines itself through resistance. Degrowth is a resistance to the imperatives of growth and techno-solutionism in education (Rudolph, 2026). It resists the neoliberal straitjacket that constrains thinking in business education (Liuzzo, 2025). Furthermore, radical degrowth, alongside a radicalising disobedience pedagogy, is considered necessary to undermine the dominant paradigm of neoliberal growth and the regime that sustains it (Laasch, 2024).

Critical thinking and questioning Through its critical orientation, it is recognised as grounded in critical pedagogy (Bobulescu, 2022; Liuzzo, 2025) but also seen to contribute to it by questioning the ideology of progress and its technological dimension (Bobulescu, 2022). At its core lies a commitment to challenging, questioning, and resisting dominant assumptions. It seeks not merely reform but the transformation and, ultimately, the dismantling of the growth paradigm, rather than primarily focusing on the transmission of degrowth theory, values, and principles. Many studies characterise it as multi-paradigmatic, in the sense that it aims to offer alternative perspectives beyond the growth-oriented capitalist paradigm (Kaufmann et al., 2019; White, 2024; Liuzzo, 2025; Liuzzo & Tsai, 2025). As Tannock (2025, p. 457) argues its goal should not be “to indoctrinate learners into degrowth theory but [to] engage them in critical reflection on hegemonic discourses of growth that permeate contemporary society”. Similarly, Liuzzo (2025, p. 5) states that the value of degrowth “lies in its broad critique rather than adherence to a narrowly defined agenda”. Unlearning growthism, progress, and technologically driven paradigms, namely the fundamentally flawed, taken-for-granted assumptions and practices, forms the basis of degrowth pedagogy (Bobulescu, 2022; Laasch, 2024; Rudolph et al., 2026).

Thinking and realising degrowth At the same time, what distinguishes degrowth pedagogy is its explicit degrowth orientation. Its distinctiveness lies in challenging economic growth and in proposing an alternative, fundamentally opposed, and radical model of economy and society. Thus, giving space to degrowth theories has been recognised as an important element of degrowth pedagogy and education (Liuzzo, 2025; Liuzzo & Tsai, 2025; Tannock, 2025). Degrowth theory thus functions as a catalyst for challenging the growth paradigm and identifying alternative pathways. In this way, degrowth pedagogy aims to respond to calls for profound transformation within education, recognising that education in its current form has been unable to prevent or alleviate the ecological crisis.

Conviviality, care and emancipatory capacities Degrowth pedagogy seeks to support a transition towards a world beyond growth, which requires a radical transformation of social imaginaries and broader cultural change leading to new life objectives (White, 2024). It is therefore understood as necessitating a transformative, critical-emancipatory approach (Kauffman et al., 2019), aimed at fostering active citizenship and individual empowerment (Bobulescu, 2022; Kopnina & Bedford, 2024). Liuzzo (2025) refers to a ‘childlike’ mindset that is emancipatory and capable of disrupting taken-for-granted ways of doing things. Several studies emphasise the values that degrowth may introduce into education, such as conviviality, care, reciprocity, and companionship (Selwyn, 2024; Rudolph et al., 2026). In this sense, degrowth pedagogy is seen to reshape the very aims of education (Rudolph et al., 2026). Selwyn (2024), for instance, critiques the continued excessive application of digital technologies in education, arguing that educational technologies should instead align with degrowth principles – fostering conviviality, autonomy, communing, and care – while remaining understandable, empowering, and controllable by their users. Similarly, Jones (2021) envisions degrowth education as grounded in the principles of simplicity, conviviality, care and ritual destruction of accumulation. Such an approach limits possibilities, rejects competitive individualism, performance metrics and the tendency to accumulate more knowledge. In contrast, Tannock (2025) does not believe that degrowth is a good framework for an education reform arguing that education is a sector that should grow – not degrow.

4.3. Meso: Institutional level analysis of degrowth pedagogy

Ecocentrism and ecoliteracy Institutional-level analyses of degrowth pedagogy at the level of universities or curricula remain largely absent from the existing literature. Kopnina and Bedford (2024), however, argue that curricula guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be further developed towards a degrowth-informed ecopedagogy – one that is ecocentric, biodiversity-focused, and oriented towards fostering ecoliteracy and interdisciplinary approaches that integrate ecology, business, and the social sciences. Mainstream education for sustainable development has been criticised for reproducing the dominant economic paradigm (Kauffman et al., 2019; Baldacchino & Saeverot, 2024; Rudolph, 2026).

4.4. Micro: Classroom level analysis of degrowth pedagogy

Understanding historical, value-laden and political nature of social systems To support anti-paradigmatic thinking within degrowth pedagogy, the deconstruction of the historical emergence of the growth paradigm is crucial (Laasch, 2024). Recognising its historical, value-laden, and political nature serves to counteract the self-fulfilling inevitability often attributed to the growth paradigm. When framed as a socially constructed paradigm, it restores a sense of agency to students (Liuzzo, 2025). Similarly, Kauffman et al. (2019) emphasise the politicisation of education – that is, opening educational spaces to questions of power and to a plurality of alternative perspectives.

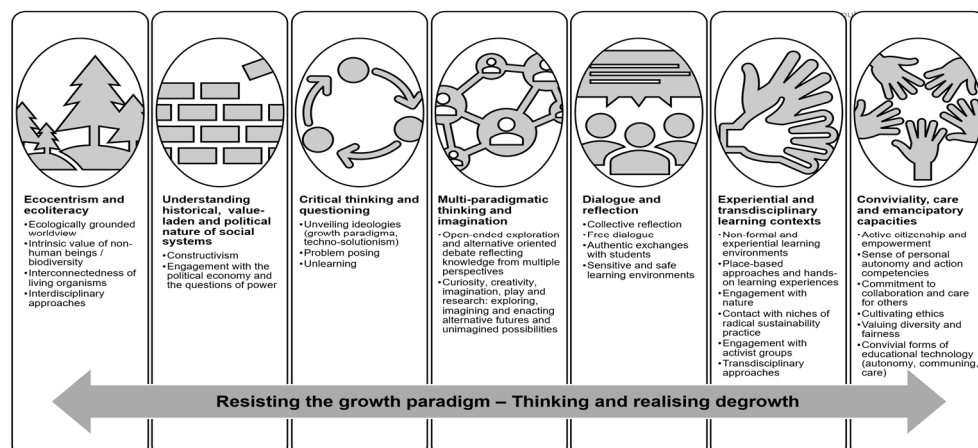
Multi-paradigmatic thinking and imagination Many studies emphasis – related to the critical questioning – the open-ended exploration and the imagining of alternative futures (Bobulescu, 2022; Baldacchino & Saeverot, 2024; White, 2024; Liuzzo, 2025; Liuzzo & Tsai, 2025). Terms, such as rethinking, reimagining and reshaping are frequently employed to characterise degrowth pedagogy. Liuzzo and Tsai (2025) describe degrowth pedagogy as a means of addressing the ‘crisis of imagination’ in business schools. Similarly, Liuzzo (2025) highlights the importance of plurality, emphasising that knowledge should be critically reflected upon from multiple perspectives. Bobulescu (2022), in turn, advocates for curiosity and research, and stimulating creativity through alternative-oriented debate.

Dialogue and reflection / Experiential and transdisciplinary learning contexts Degrowth pedagogy emphasises open discussions, dialogue and reflection (Kauffman et al., 2019). Furthermore, Kauffman et al. (2019) and Laasch (2024) highlight role of non-formal settings as learning environments and transdisciplinary experiential learning. Laasch (2024) suggest that teachers could facilitate student engagement with activist groups and invite radical activist to discuss with students to support students in enacting resistance and civil disobedience. Similarly, Kaufmann et al. (2019) encourages to establish direct contact to existing niches of radical sustainability practice. Overall, sensitive and safe learning environments that enable experiential learning are seen crucial (Kaufmann et al., 2019).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Figure 1 illustrates the elements of degrowth pedagogy in management and business education. While macro-level visions concerning the significance and aims of degrowth pedagogy are present across all articles, meso-level analyses remain largely absent, particularly with respect to what degrowth pedagogy entails at the level of universities and curriculums. Overall, degrowth pedagogy remains an emerging field of study, and its relationship to related educational perspectives, such as critical pedagogy, ecopedagogy, and transformative sustainability education, requires further elaboration.

Figure 1. Fundamental elements of degrowth pedagogy.



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*Included in the review.