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ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Conciencia ambiental frente al cambio climático en Vietnam: un análisis para la sostenibilidad y la ética ambiental

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Resumen. El siglo XXI ha sido testigo de desafíos ecológicos sin precedentes, entre ellos la contaminación ambiental, el cambio climático y el agotamiento de los recursos naturales, que amenazan cada vez más la estabilidad ecológica, la seguridad alimentaria y el desarrollo sostenible a nivel mundial. En Vietnam, el rápido crecimiento económico durante el período de reformas ha generado importantes presiones ambientales, lo que pone de manifiesto la urgente necesidad de fortalecer la conciencia ciudadana sobre la protección ambiental y el cambio climático. Basado en el materialismo dialéctico e histórico marxista, y nutrido por los estudios de sostenibilidad y la ética ambiental, este estudio examina el papel, el estado actual y los factores determinantes de la conciencia ambiental ecológica en Vietnam. Metodológicamente, la investigación integra el análisis cualitativo de documentos con una encuesta sociológica de alcance nacional aplicada a 2.960 encuestados, captando múltiples dimensiones de la conciencia ambiental, incluidas el conocimiento, las actitudes, los valores y los comportamientos auto-reportados. Los resultados indican que la conciencia ambiental entre los ciudadanos vietnamitas ha mejorado considerablemente, en particular en el reconocimiento de la importancia de la protección ambiental y en la aceptación de la responsabilidad compartida entre el Estado, las empresas y los individuos. Sin embargo, persisten brechas significativas entre la conciencia y el comporta-

miento ambientalmente responsable de manera consistente, especialmente entre diferentes grupos socioeconómicos y regiones. Estas disparidades reflejan tensiones estructurales entre las prioridades del desarrollo económico y la sostenibilidad ambiental. El estudio sostiene que la construcción de la conciencia sobre la protección ambiental y el cambio climático debe entenderse como un proceso sistémico y de largo plazo, arraigado en valores éticos, prácticas sociales y marcos institucionales. Concluye proponiendo implicaciones de política orientadas a fortalecer la educación ambiental, mejorar la aplicación de la legislación y a integrar la ética ambiental en las estrategias de desarrollo sostenible en Vietnam.

Palabras clave: conciencia ambiental, protección ambiental, cambio climático, sostenibilidad, Vietnam.

Environmental awareness in the face of climate change in Vietnam: an analysis for sustainability and environmental ethics

Abstract. The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented ecological challenges, including environmental pollution, climate change, and natural resource depletion, which increasingly threaten ecological stability, food security, and sustainable development worldwide. In Vietnam, rapid economic growth during the reform period has generated significant environmental pressures, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen environmental protection and climate change awareness among citizens. Grounded in Marxist dialectical and historical materialism, and informed by sustainability studies and environmental ethics, this study examines the role, current state, and determinants of ecological environmental awareness in Vietnam. Methodologically, the research integrates qualitative document analysis with a nationwide sociological survey of 2,960 respondents, capturing multiple dimensions of environmental awareness, including knowledge, attitudes, values, and self-reported behaviors. The findings indicate that environmental awareness among Vietnamese citizens has improved considerably, particularly in terms of recognizing the importance of environmental protection and acknowledging shared responsibility among the State, enterprises, and individuals. However, notable gaps persist between awareness and consistent pro-environmental behavior, especially across different socio-economic groups and regions. These disparities reflect structural tensions between economic development priorities and environmental sustainability. The study argues that building environmental protection and climate change awareness should be understood as a long-term, systemic process rooted in ethical values, social practice, and institutional frameworks. It concludes by proposing policy implications aimed at strengthening environmental education, enhancing legal enforcement, and integrating environmental ethics into sustainable development strategies in Vietnam.

Keywords: environmental awareness, environmental protection, climate change, sustainability, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation has become one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, threatening ecological stability, public health, and the long-term foundations of socio-economic development. Climate change, biodiversity loss, water pollution, and resource depletion increasingly reveal the structural limits of development models that prioritize economic growth while externalizing environmental costs. In this context, protecting the ecological environment is no longer merely a normative aspiration but an urgent prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive development.

Vietnam exemplifies this global dilemma in an intensified form. Over nearly four decades of economic renovation, the country has achieved remarkable progress in industrialization, urbanization, and poverty reduction. However, this rapid transformation has also generated severe environmental pressures, including industrial pollution, ecosystem degradation, waste mismanagement, and heightened vulnerability to climate change. Empirical evidence shows that environmental incidents in industrial zones, craft villages, and river basins continue to undermine both environmental quality and social trust. These challenges indicate that environmental protection in Vietnam has entered a critical phase where incremental policy adjustments are no longer sufficient.

Against this backdrop, environmental awareness has emerged as a key mediating factor between policy intentions and actual environmental outcomes. A growing body of international literature highlights that environmental governance cannot rely solely on regulatory instruments or technological solutions; it must also address social consciousness, ethical responsibility, and public participation. Environmental awareness shapes how individuals perceive environmental risks, evaluate trade-offs between economic and ecological interests, and translate knowledge into everyday practices. Consequently, strengthening ecological environmental awareness is increasingly recognized as a strategic pillar of sustainable development.

In Vietnam, the Communist Party and the State consistently emphasize environmental protection as an integral component of national development strategy. Party documents and policy frameworks affirm that economic growth must be harmonized with environmental sustainability to ensure a “prosperous people, strong country, democracy, equity, and civilization.” Nevertheless, persistent environmental degradation suggests a disjunction between policy commitments and societal practice. While environmental education campaigns and legal frameworks have expanded, their effectiveness in shaping stable, internalized environmental awareness across diverse social groups remains uncertain.

From a theoretical standpoint, Marxist philosophy offers a critical lens for understanding this contradiction. Marx and Engels conceptualized the relationship between humans and nature as a dialectical unity mediated by social production. Environmental degradation, from this perspective, reflects a “metabolic rift” arising from production systems that disrupt the material exchange between society and nature. In the Vietnamese context, Ho Chi Minh’s thought further enriches this framework by emphasizing harmony with nature, thrift, collective responsibility, and the ethical foundations of social development. When integrated with contemporary sustainability theory and environmental ethics, Marxist analysis underscores that environmental protection is not a technical add-on but a structural and moral requirement of development.

Despite this theoretical richness, existing empirical studies on environmental awareness in Vietnam reveal several limitations. First, much of the literature remains descriptive, focusing on policy narratives or isolated educational initiatives without systematically assessing public awareness at the national level. Second, quantitative studies often measure environmental knowledge or attitudes in isolation, neglecting the ethical and structural dimensions emphasized in Marxist and sustainability theories. Third, few studies explicitly examine the gap between environmental awareness and actual behavior, particularly across different socio-economic groups. As a result, current research provides limited guidance on how environmental awareness can be transformed into sustained social practice.

This study addresses these gaps by examining ecological environmental awareness in Vietnam through an integrated theoretical–empirical framework grounded in Marxist philosophy, sustainability studies, and environmental ethics. Using sociological survey data from 2,960 respondents nationwide, the research analyzes not only levels of environmental awareness but also their distribution across age, education, occupation, and place of residence, as well as the relationship between awareness, ethical orientation, and behavior.

The central research questions guiding this study are: (i) What is the current state of ecological environmental awareness among the Vietnamese population? (ii) How do socio-demographic factors shape differences in environmental awareness and behavior? (iii) To what extent does environmental awareness translate into pro-environmental practice, and where do gaps persist? (iiii) What policy implications emerge from integrating Marxist theory, sustainability principles, and empirical evidence?

By addressing these questions, this study makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides updated national-level evidence on environmental awareness in Vietnam at a time of escalating ecological risk. Theoretically, it bridges Marxist ecological thought with contemporary sustainability and environmental ethics, demonstrating their continued relevance for developing countries. Practically, it offers policy-oriented insights into how environmental awareness can be institutionalized as a driver of sustainable development rather than a symbolic slogan.

In doing so, the study responds to the urgent need for research that moves beyond historical accumulation and normative assertions to confront the present ecological crisis in Vietnam, where the effectiveness of environmental governance increasingly depends on the depth, coherence, and social embeddedness of ecological environmental awareness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines ecological environmental awareness among the Vietnamese population, with Vietnam as the empirical research context. The research is grounded in the theoretical framework of Marxist–Leninist dialectical and historical materialism, which conceptualizes the relationship between humans and nature as a socially mediated and historically conditioned process. On this basis, the study draws upon the theoretical contributions of Karl Marx (Marx, K. and F. Engels. 1995, Vol. 4, Vol. 21, Vol. 1) Friedrich Engels, and Ho Chi Minh (Ho, C.M. 2000, Vol. 12), particularly their analyses of the dialectical unity between humans, nature, and social development.

Research design and data sources

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates qualitative document analysis with quantitative sociological survey methods. First, a systematic review and analysis of secondary sources were conducted, including documents of the Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam, theses, scientific research projects, academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles related to environmental protection awareness and environmental education. These materials were critically examined to identify key theoretical perspectives, policy orientations, and practical experiences relevant to the formation of ecological environmental awareness in Vietnam.

Survey instrument and sampling

To empirically assess the current state of environmental protection awareness among the Vietnamese population, a sociological survey was conducted using structured questionnaires. The survey employed a random sampling strategy to ensure representativeness across different regions and social groups. A total of 2,960 valid responses were collected nationwide.

The questionnaire was designed to measure key dimensions of ecological environmental awareness, including environmental knowledge, attitudes, values, and self-reported behaviors related to environmental protection. Items were constructed based on established theoretical frameworks in environmental ethics and sustainability studies, and were adapted to the Vietnamese socio-cultural context.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through both online and face-to-face survey methods to enhance coverage and reduce sampling bias. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using statistical techniques appropriate for social science research. Descriptive statistics were employed to identify general trends and patterns in environmental awareness, while comparative analyses were used to examine differences across demographic groups. To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, survey results were triangulated with secondary statistical data, policy documents, and direct observations of environmental education practices in practice.

Analytical methods

In addition to quantitative analysis, the study employs a combination of qualitative analytical methods, including abstraction, generalization, logical–historical analysis, comparison, analysis, and synthesis. These methods are used to clarify theoretical arguments, interpret empirical findings, and connect observed practices with broader Marxist perspectives on human–nature relations, sustainable development, and environmental ethics.

Through the integration of theoretical analysis and empirical investigation, this methodological approach enables a comprehensive examination of both the achievements and limitations of environmental protection awareness education in Vietnam, while ensuring the scientific rigor and credibility of the research findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As humanity enters the twenty-first century, following the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, environmental issues and environmental protection have emerged as matters of growing global concern. Alongside this heightened attention, the concept of the environment itself has been examined and interpreted from multiple perspectives. Despite differences in approach, scholars both domestically and internationally generally converge on the view that the environment constitutes one of the four fundamental pillars sustaining the Earth as a common home, alongside population, natural resources, and economic development. An imbalance among these pillars—particularly when economic development expands at the expense of environmental integrity—inevitably threatens ecological stability and, ultimately, human survival.

In the Vietnamese context, the Law on Environmental Protection (2020) provides a comprehensive legal definition, stating that the environment encompasses both natural and artificial physical factors that are closely interconnected, surrounding humans and exerting direct impacts on life, economic activities, social development, and the existence of humans, living organisms, and nature as a whole (Law on Environmental Protection. 2020). This definition reflects a holistic understanding of the environment as a complex and integrated system rather than a purely natural or technical entity.

Human–environment relationship: a philosophical perspective

From a philosophical standpoint, the relationship between humans and the environment is inherently dialectical. The environment not only shapes human existence and social development but is also continuously transformed by human activities. From this perspective, the environment may be understood as everything external to the human body that directly or indirectly influences human life, production, and development. Humans and their environment thus exist as two distinct yet inseparable entities, unified through mutual interaction and transformation. As some philosophical interpretations suggest, the boundary between humans and the environment is often blurred, given the depth of their interdependence.

Environmental protection, therefore, extends beyond technical measures to encompass broader ethical, cultural, and social dimensions. It refers to activities aimed at maintaining a clean, healthy, and balanced environment; preventing and mitigating negative impacts caused by human actions and natural disasters; and ensuring the rational exploitation and sustainable use of natural resources. Protecting the environment ultimately means safeguarding the very foundations of human survival, while also preserving biodiversity and ecological balance. As such, environmental protection represents both a right and an obligation of every organization, household, and individual, serving as an important indicator of a civilized society and reflecting long-standing cultural traditions of living in harmony with nature (Thanh, N. V., & Tuan, P. T. 2024).

Environmental Awareness in Marxist–Leninist Philosophy

Within Marxist–Leninist philosophy, consciousness is understood as a social product arising from the interaction between humans and objective reality through labor, language, and social practice. Marx and Engels emphasized that consciousness is inseparable from material existence,

asserting that “consciousness can never be anything other than conscious existence, and the existence of humans is their real life process” (Marx, K. and F. Engels. 1995, Vol. 3). Accordingly, environmental awareness is not merely an individual cognitive state but a socially constructed form of consciousness shaped by historical conditions, modes of production, and social relations.

Marxist–Leninist philosophy classifies social consciousness into various forms, including political, legal, ethical, aesthetic, religious, and scientific consciousness. Within this framework, environmental protection awareness raises an important theoretical question: whether it constitutes an independent form of social consciousness or a composite and specialized expression of social awareness. In practice, environmental awareness reflects the complex and historically conditioned relationship between humans, society, and nature, particularly in the context of industrialization, environmental degradation, and climate change.

From a structural perspective, environmental protection awareness manifests at both individual and collective levels. Environmental pollution, resource depletion, and ecological crises are not natural phenomena but outcomes of human social practice. Consequently, environmental awareness must aim to correctly reflect the laws governing natural systems and their significance for human society. As a positive reflection of the human–nature relationship, environmental protection awareness becomes an integral component of social consciousness.

In terms of content, environmental protection awareness encompasses knowledge, emotions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavioral intentions related to environmental issues. However, given the breadth and complexity of human–nature interactions, environmental awareness is often regarded not as a form of social consciousness equivalent to politics or ethics, but rather as a special and integrative form of social awareness that intersects multiple domains of social life (Communist Party of Vietnam. 2021, Vol. 1).

Environmental ethics, aesthetic values, and sustainability

According to Marxist philosophy, human beings are not merely biological entities but social beings defined by the totality of social relations. Human development therefore involves not only the satisfaction of material needs but also the fulfillment of spiritual and aesthetic needs. The harmony and beauty of the natural environment constitute an essential component of human spiritual life. From the perspective of environmental ethics and aesthetic culture, environmental protection awareness plays an orienting role in guiding human activities toward nature. It transcends purely utilitarian objectives by integrating ethical responsibility and aesthetic appreciation, thereby promoting voluntary environmental protection behaviors that generate both material and spiritual benefits.

Environmental awareness education emerges, in this context, as a critical instrument for improving quality of life and advancing sustainable development. Environmental education involves the formation and development of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that enable individuals to actively participate in building an ecologically sustainable society. Beyond raising awareness, environmental education encourages concrete actions to protect ecosystems and conserve natural resources, fostering a sense of intergenerational responsibility and ecological citizenship.

Through environmental education, individuals gain a deeper understanding of their role in reducing pollution, conserving resources, and maintaining ecological balance. This process supports the adoption of environmentally friendly practices in daily life and contributes to the creation of a healthy, clean, and resource-efficient living environment. Ultimately, environmental education serves as a key pathway for integrating environmental ethics into social practice, thereby reinforcing the foundations of sustainable development.

Conceptualizing environmental protection education

From a comprehensive perspective, environmental protection education can be understood as a purposeful and systematic process through which educators employ appropriate content, methods, and tools to equip individuals with knowledge about ecological systems and the interdependent relationship between humans and nature. This process also involves disseminating legal frameworks, policy orientations, and practical measures related to environmental protection. By internalizing the significance of the ecological environment for human life, individuals develop proactive attitudes and engage in positive actions to protect their living environment, participate in community-based environmental initiatives, and actively oppose behaviors that degrade ecological systems.

RESULTS

Current status of environmental protection awareness education in Vietnam

In the context of industrialization and modernization, environmental protection has been consistently identified as a strategic priority by the Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam. The 13th National Congress of the Communist Party emphasized strengthening enforcement mechanisms, applying strict sanctions for environmental violations, and operationalizing the “polluter pays” principle, whereby polluters bear the costs of remediation and environmental restoration, while beneficiaries of natural resources are required to contribute financially to environmental protection efforts (Communist Party of Vietnam. 2021, Vol. 1). Protecting public health and the quality of the living environment was articulated as a central objective, reflecting an institutional commitment to harmonizing economic development with environmental protection.

Environmental Education for Strengthening Ecological Awareness, Sustainable Development, Prosperity, and Human Well-being (Nguyen Viet Thanh, Luong Thi Hoai Thanh. 2026). Over nearly four decades of renovation, Vietnam has achieved substantial economic growth (Ho, V.H.2020). At the same time, this development trajectory has exerted growing pressure on the human–nature relationship, producing both improvements in living standards and significant environmental stress. In response, ecological environmental protection has been formally incorporated as a foundational component of national sustainable development strategies, notably through the Resolution of the 7th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee (June 3, 2013) on climate change response, natural resource management, and environmental protection.

As a result of sustained policy attention, Vietnam's legal and institutional framework for environmental protection has expanded and become more coherent over time. Financial and social resources allocated to environmental protection have gradually increased, contributing to enhanced governance capacity and broader dissemination of environmental protection objectives.

Public awareness of environmental protection: empirical evidence

Survey results indicate a relatively high level of environmental awareness among the Vietnamese population. A large majority of respondents (90.64%) affirmed the essential role of the environment in sustaining human life, suggesting widespread recognition of environmental importance.

Data on information sources reveal that environmental knowledge and legal awareness are primarily acquired through formal education (71.9%), followed by books, newspapers, and the internet (10.74%), television (9.92%), and other channels (7.44%) (Thanh, N. V., & Toan, N. V. 2023). This pattern highlights the central role of educational institutions in shaping environmental awareness, alongside supplementary contributions from mass media and digital platforms.

Awareness of climate change, ecological degradation, and natural resource depletion has increased across social groups. Respondents reported heightened attention to pollution in industrial zones, craft villages, urban areas, and major river basins, as well as to disaster prevention and mitigation measures. Furthermore, 82.7% of respondents reported being "very concerned" and 9.1% "concerned" about environmental pollution, climate change, drought, and saltwater intrusion.

Regarding responsibility attribution, 85.95% of respondents correctly identified environmental protection as a shared responsibility involving individuals, businesses, and the state. A substantial proportion also associated environmental degradation with short-term, utilitarian economic thinking that prioritizes immediate gains over long-term sustainability. In terms of the human–nature relationship, 86.8% of respondents recognized environmental degradation as primarily resulting from human activities and acknowledged the reciprocal interaction between society and nature.

Environmental ethics and behavioral orientation

Survey findings indicate that 76.86% of respondents identified environmental ethics as governing the relationship between humans and nature, while 19.01% associated it with human–human relations and 4.13% with nature–human relations. These results suggest a relatively high level of awareness regarding ethical norms and legal standards related to environmental protection.

Many respondents reported adjusting their behavior in accordance with ethical and legal expectations, indicating a degree of internalization of environmental norms. However, a minority demonstrated limited or unclear understanding of the scope and content of environmental ethics.

Policy implementation and institutional context

Vietnam has implemented a wide range of policies, strategies, and legal instruments aimed at environmental protection and natural resource management. Investments in education, training, scientific research, and institutional capacity related to ecological protection have increased over time. Environmental governance structures have been progressively strengthened from the central to local levels.

Legal frameworks addressing environmental protection, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, and pollution control continue to be refined. Environmental inspection, monitoring, and digitalization initiatives have expanded, particularly in waste management and environmental impact assessment. International cooperation in environmental governance and sustainable resource use has also been promoted to enhance environmental, water, food, and energy security (Communist Party of Vietnam. 2021).

Traditional Vietnamese cultural values emphasizing respect for nature and harmonious co-existence continue to shape environmental awareness across social strata (Communist Party of Vietnam. 2004),

Persistent challenges and limitations

Despite these developments, survey data and secondary evidence reveal persistent challenges. Environmental awareness and commitment among certain leadership groups, enterprises, and segments of the population remain uneven (Phan Hoang, T.T. and T. Kato. 2016). Economic objectives are still frequently prioritized over environmental considerations, contributing to inefficient resource use and environmental degradation.

A proportion of respondents (7.44%) reported limited engagement with environmental information channels, indicating uneven access to and utilization of environmental knowledge across social groups. This finding suggests that environmental awareness, while generally improving, remains fragmented and unevenly distributed. Moreover, although Vietnam's legal framework for environmental protection is relatively comprehensive, enforcement effectiveness varies across regions and sectors, and sanctions are not always sufficiently deterrent (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). High-profile pollution cases—such as the Vedan wastewater discharge into the Thi Vai River (Lorenz et al., 2021) and the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel environmental disaster (Fan, Chiu, & Mabon, 2022)—illustrate persistent governance and accountability challenges, particularly the gap between regulatory commitments and actual implementation. These cases underscore that environmental degradation cannot be attributed solely to individual behavior but is deeply embedded in institutional capacity and governance structures (Nguyen, 2010). Recent studies further suggest that cultural and ethical factors, including religious values and moral worldviews, play an increasingly important role in shaping environmental stewardship in Vietnam. Faith-inspired initiatives, particularly within Buddhist communities, have contributed to climate change adaptation and sustainable development efforts by promoting ethical responsibility, social solidarity, and respect for nature (Nguyen Viet Thanh et al., 2025; Nguyen Viet Thanh et al., 2024). Together, these findings highlight the need to integrate institutional governance, ethical education, and cultural resources in strengthening environmental protection practices.

Environmental degradation remains particularly pronounced in rural and mountainous areas, where access to clean water and sanitation is limited. Pollution from craft villages, intensive agricultural chemical use, and industrial relocation continues to undermine biodiversity, food safety, and soil and water quality. Water pollution in major river systems and urban waterways frequently exceeds national standards (Bui & Do, 2017; Le et al., 2021), while biodiversity loss driven by deforestation and illegal wildlife trade persists.

Despite gradual increases, public investment in environmental protection remains at approximately 1% of the state budget, constraining mitigation and adaptation capacity (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). This limitation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations and intersects with multidimensional poverty, where education plays a critical role in enhancing both environmental awareness and adaptive capacity (Thanh & Dien, 2023).

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These findings directly address the research gap identified in the Introduction by demonstrating that environmental awareness in Vietnam is shaped not only by individual knowledge but also by structural economic pressures, ethical internalization, and institutional governance.

The empirical findings presented in Section 4 offer robust evidence regarding the current state of environmental protection awareness in Vietnam and provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and educational initiatives. Overall, the results indicate a noticeable improvement in environmental awareness across the population, particularly in terms of recognizing the essential role of the environment in sustaining human life, acknowledging shared responsibility for environmental protection, and understanding the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. These patterns reflect the cumulative impact of state-led environmental policies, formal education programs, and socio-cultural values that traditionally emphasize harmony between humans and the natural world.

From a Marxist theoretical perspective, this improvement can be interpreted as a gradual transformation of social consciousness shaped by evolving material conditions and social practice. As Marx and Engels argued, consciousness does not arise independently of reality but is produced and reproduced through concrete social activity. The survey results suggest that environmental awareness in Vietnam is increasingly embedded in everyday life, particularly through institutionalized education, mass media, and community-based initiatives. However, the continued presence of environmentally harmful behaviors among certain social groups reveals a persistent contradiction between awareness and action. This contradiction reflects the uneven development of social consciousness in a context where economic imperatives—especially those related to production efficiency, profit maximization, and local growth targets—continue to exert strong influence over individual and collective behavior.

From the standpoint of sustainability theory, the findings expose a structural tension between rapid economic growth and environmental protection. While a majority of respondent's express concern about environmental degradation and climate change, ecological considerations are frequently subordinated to short-term economic objectives, particularly at the enterprise and

local governance levels. This pattern is characteristic of many developing economies undergoing accelerated industrialization, where economic competitiveness often outweighs long-term ecological sustainability. Empirical evidence of ongoing pollution in industrial zones, craft villages, and major river basins underscores the limitations of awareness-centered approaches when they are not accompanied by institutional enforcement, economic restructuring, and coherent policy coordination.

Environmental ethics provides a complementary interpretive lens for understanding these dynamics. The relatively high proportion of respondents who acknowledge environmental ethics as a guiding principle in the human–nature relationship indicates a growing moral sensitivity and ethical orientation toward environmental protection. Notably, many individuals report voluntary behavioral adjustments in accordance with ethical and legal norms, suggesting a gradual shift from externally imposed compliance toward internally motivated responsibility. Nevertheless, the persistence of a segment of the population with limited ethical understanding highlights the insufficiency of awareness-building efforts that focus primarily on information dissemination rather than on value formation, moral reasoning, and ethical reflection.

Importantly, the recurrence of major environmental incidents and regulatory failures—particularly large-scale industrial pollution cases—reveals a significant gap between ethical awareness at the societal level and institutional practice. These cases demonstrate that environmental degradation cannot be attributed solely to individual ignorance or negligence but must be understood as the outcome of systemic governance weaknesses, regulatory loopholes, and inadequate accountability mechanisms. From a Marxist ecological perspective, such outcomes reflect structural contradictions within production systems that prioritize economic accumulation over social welfare and ecological integrity. Taken together, the findings empirically confirm the research gap identified in the literature: prevailing approaches tend to conceptualize environmental awareness as an individual behavioral variable while insufficiently accounting for its structural, ethical, and political–economic embeddedness.

Policy implications

Drawing on the above discussion, several policy implications can be proposed to strengthen ecological environmental awareness and advance sustainable development in Vietnam.

First, environmental awareness education should be further institutionalized as a core pillar of national sustainable development strategies. Beyond formal schooling, environmental education needs to be systematically integrated into lifelong learning frameworks, community-based programs, and workplace training. Educational content should move beyond technical and scientific knowledge to incorporate environmental ethics, legal responsibility, and the dialectical relationship between humans, society, and nature, drawing on Marxist philosophical principles to cultivate critical, reflective, and socially grounded environmental consciousness.

Second, policy interventions should explicitly address the gap between awareness and action. While general awareness levels are relatively high, environmentally responsible behavior remains uneven across social groups and economic sectors. Bridging this gap requires aligning en-

vironmental education with economic and social incentive structures, including the promotion of green consumption, support for environmentally responsible enterprises, and the incorporation of environmental criteria into economic planning, investment decisions, and performance evaluation at both central and local levels.

Third, strengthening legal enforcement and institutional accountability is essential for translating awareness into effective environmental protection. Although Vietnam has established a relatively comprehensive legal framework for environmental governance, enforcement remains inconsistent. Sanctions for environmental violations must be sufficiently stringent to deter misconduct, while regulatory loopholes should be systematically addressed. Enhancing transparency, public participation, and community-based monitoring mechanisms can empower citizens and civil society organizations to play a more active role in environmental oversight.

Fourth, environmental ethics should be explicitly embedded in policy design and corporate governance frameworks. Enterprises should be encouraged—and, where necessary, compelled—to internalize environmental costs through instruments such as the “polluter pays” principle, environmental taxation, and mandatory environmental impact assessments. Ethical responsibility toward the environment should be institutionalized as a core component of corporate social responsibility, professional standards, and managerial accountability.

Fifth, increased investment in environmental infrastructure, green technologies, and the environmental industry is critical. Expanding budget allocations for waste management, renewable energy, ecological restoration, and pollution control can help address persistent environmental pressures. At the same time, policies should restrict the importation of outdated and environmentally harmful technologies while actively promoting innovation aligned with green growth and circular economy objectives.

Finally, environmental protection strategies should build upon Vietnam’s cultural traditions that emphasize respect for nature and harmonious coexistence. Leveraging these cultural values can strengthen public engagement, reinforce environmental ethics at the community level, and ensure that sustainability is perceived not as an external constraint but as an integral element of national identity and long-term social development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined ecological environmental awareness in Vietnam through an integrated theoretical and empirical framework grounded in Marxist philosophy, sustainability studies, and environmental ethics. By combining dialectical and historical materialism with large-scale sociological survey data from 2,960 respondents nationwide, the research provides both conceptual clarification and empirical evidence regarding the role of environmental awareness in promoting sustainable development. In doing so, the study responds directly to the research gap identified in the literature, where environmental awareness is often treated as an individual cognitive or behavioral variable rather than as a socially embedded and ethically mediated form of social consciousness.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reaffirm the contemporary relevance of Marxist ecological thought in addressing current environmental challenges. Marx and Engels' analysis of the disrupted "metabolic interaction" between humans and nature provides a critical lens for understanding environmental degradation as a structural outcome of unsustainable production and consumption patterns, rather than merely a consequence of technological limitations or individual misconduct. In the Vietnamese context, this perspective is further enriched by Ho Chi Minh's emphasis on harmony between humans and nature, thrift, and collective responsibility. Together, these theoretical foundations underscore that environmental protection is not an external constraint on development but an intrinsic requirement of a people-centered, sustainable development pathway. The integration of sustainability theory and environmental ethics complements this analysis by highlighting intergenerational justice, moral responsibility, and the need to align economic growth with ecological integrity and social equity.

Empirically, the survey results indicate that ecological environmental awareness among the Vietnamese population has improved in recent years, particularly in terms of general knowledge and expressed attitudes toward environmental protection. A large proportion of respondents recognize the importance of protecting natural resources, reducing pollution, and participating in environmentally friendly practices. These findings reflect the positive effects of state policies, educational initiatives, and mass media communication on environmental issues. However, the study also reveals a persistent gap between awareness, attitudes, and actual behavior. Although environmental concern is widespread, consistent pro-environmental practices—such as waste sorting, reduced plastic use, or sustained participation in community-based environmental initiatives—remain uneven and fragmented.

Further analysis demonstrates that environmental awareness and behavior vary significantly across social groups. Younger respondents and those with higher levels of education tend to exhibit stronger awareness and more proactive environmental behaviors, suggesting the effectiveness of formal education and youth-oriented campaigns. In contrast, limitations are more pronounced among certain rural populations and informal labor groups, where economic pressures, livelihood insecurity, and limited access to information constrain the translation of awareness into action. These patterns confirm that ecological environmental awareness is shaped not only by individual cognition but also by broader socio-economic conditions and institutional contexts, reinforcing the Marxist insight that consciousness is inseparable from material and social realities.

By linking theoretical analysis with empirical evidence, this study reinforces the argument that building ecological environmental awareness must be understood as a long-term, systemic process rather than a short-term mobilization effort. Environmental awareness cannot be reduced to slogans or isolated campaigns; it requires sustained interventions across educational, cultural, legal, and institutional domains. From a Marxist perspective, the people are both the subjects and beneficiaries of environmental protection. Consequently, fostering ecological environmental awareness across all social strata is essential to ensuring that development remains sustainable, equitable, and consistent with socialist-oriented values.

In terms of policy implications, the study highlights several strategic directions for strengthening environmental governance and awareness-building in Vietnam. First, environmental education should be further institutionalized across all levels of the education system, from primary schooling to higher education and vocational training. Educational programs should move beyond knowledge transmission to emphasize environmental ethics, civic responsibility, and critical thinking, enabling individuals to identify, question, and resist environmentally harmful practices. Second, community-based approaches should be strengthened to bridge the gap between awareness and action. Local mass organizations, socio-political associations, and grassroots institutions play a crucial role in translating national policies into everyday practices that are culturally appropriate and socially inclusive.

Third, environmental awareness-building must be closely linked with legal education and effective enforcement. Awareness without accountability risks remaining symbolic. Enhancing public understanding of environmental laws, citizens' rights, and obligations can empower individuals and communities to participate actively in environmental monitoring and protection. This approach aligns with the broader objective of building a socialist rule-of-law state in which citizens are active agents rather than passive recipients of policy. Fourth, environmental communication strategies should be diversified and tailored to different social groups, making greater use of digital platforms, social media, and locally embedded cultural forms to improve accessibility and impact.

Beyond its national relevance, this study contributes to the international literature by providing empirical evidence from Vietnam, a country undergoing rapid industrialization and social transformation within a socialist-oriented development framework. The findings demonstrate that Marxist theory, when integrated with contemporary sustainability science and environmental ethics, remains analytically valuable for understanding environmental challenges in the Global South. At the same time, the study acknowledges certain limitations, including reliance on self-reported survey data and the cross-sectional nature of the analysis. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, comparative regional studies, and in-depth qualitative approaches, as well as exploring the role of digital technologies and social media in shaping environmental consciousness.

In conclusion, protecting the ecological environment in Vietnam is not merely a technical or administrative task but a comprehensive social process grounded in theory, practice, and policy. Building ecological environmental awareness among the population is both an urgent necessity and a long-term mission for sustainable development. By integrating Marxist theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and policy-oriented analysis, this study demonstrates that effective environmental protection ultimately depends on cultivating informed, ethically grounded, and socially responsible citizens who actively participate in safeguarding nature for present and future generations.

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