

# ATTITUDES TOWARD FOREST CONSERVATION AMONG LANGUAGE LEARNERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Alexander S. Ibni

Zamboanga Peninsula Polytechnic State University

Contact number: +639651074152 email: xanlee080@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** Forest conservation is a critical global concern, and fostering positive attitudes among community members is essential for sustainable environmental management. This study examined attitudes toward forest conservation among language learners, focusing on the influence of knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences on collective responsibility and pro-environmental behaviors. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, involving 10 community residents who participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to forest conservation. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: (1) awareness of environmental hazards and forest functions, where participants recognized forests as essential for mitigating floods, landslides, and climate-related impacts; (2) sense of collective responsibility, reflecting recognition that forest protection is a shared duty reinforced by social norms and community engagement; and (3) commitment to pro-environmental practices, including tree planting, waste management, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Participants emphasized that environmentally-focused educational programs, including language-based instruction, strengthened ecological literacy and positively shaped attitudes toward conservation. Findings indicate that attitudes toward forest conservation are multidimensional and dynamic, influenced by direct experience, social expectations, and educational reinforcement. The study underscores the importance of integrating knowledge dissemination, community-based initiatives, and formal educational programs to cultivate positive attitudes and sustainable behaviors. These insights can guide policymakers, educators, and community leaders in designing interventions that foster collective responsibility and long-term environmental stewardship.

**Keywords:** Forest conservation, Attitudes, Environmental education, Collective responsibility, Pro-environmental behavior

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Attitudes toward forest conservation are a critical determinant of sustainable environmental behavior and collective responsibility. Forest ecosystems provide essential services, including regulating water cycles, preventing soil erosion, mitigating natural hazards, and supporting biodiversity [1]. Positive attitudes toward forests influence individuals' willingness to participate in conservation activities, adopt pro-environmental practices, and engage in community-based environmental stewardship [4]. Understanding these attitudes is especially important in local communities, where residents' knowledge and experiences directly affect forest management and ecological protection. Research in environmental education highlights that attitudes are shaped by both formal and informal learning experiences. Integration of environmental topics into educational programs and language-based instruction has been shown to strengthen ecological literacy, reinforce social norms, and promote pro-environmental intentions [2,6,7,9]. Educational exposure enables learners to connect knowledge with practice, fostering a sense of responsibility and proactive engagement in conservation initiatives. The Theory of Planned Behavior posits that attitudes, together with subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, are key predictors of intention and actual behavior [5]. Additionally, social capital and collective action within communities support positive environmental attitudes and reinforce engagement in sustainable practices [8]. Despite these insights, there is limited research on how community residents' attitudes toward forest conservation are influenced by their knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences, particularly in the context of language-based environmental education.

To address this gap, this study focuses on the following research questions:

1. How do community residents' knowledge and educational experiences shape their attitudes toward forest conservation?
2. How do social norms and collective responsibility influence residents' pro-environmental behaviors and engagement in conservation activities?

By examining these questions, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the formation of pro-environmental attitudes and their role in guiding sustainable behaviors. The findings are expected to inform environmental education programs, community-based conservation initiatives, and policy strategies aimed at enhancing forest conservation and fostering collective responsibility.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore community residents' attitudes toward forest conservation and the factors influencing pro-environmental behaviors. A purposive sampling approach was used to select ten participants from forest-adjacent barangays who had direct interaction with local forest ecosystems and were engaged in community activities. Participants included a diverse mix of ages, occupations, and educational backgrounds to capture a range of perspectives on environmental knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which focused on participants' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to forest conservation. Interview questions explored participants' awareness of the ecological functions of forests, experiences with environmental hazards, participation in conservation activities, and the influence of educational programs, including language-based environmental instruction. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006)

framework, involving familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, and refinement of patterns related to attitudes, knowledge, and behavioral intentions. The analysis focused on three main aspects: (1) participants' awareness of environmental hazards and forest functions, (2) collective responsibility and social norms influencing attitudes, and (3) engagement in pro-environmental practices. To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails were employed, enhancing credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and provided written consent prior to participation. All procedures adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. This methodological approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences shape residents' attitudes toward forest conservation, providing rich qualitative data to inform environmental education programs and community-based conservation strategies.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of interviews with ten participants revealed three major themes reflecting attitudes toward forest conservation: awareness of environmental hazards and forest functions, sense of collective responsibility, and commitment to pro-environmental practices. These themes illustrate how knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences shape attitudes and behavior.

#### Theme 1: Awareness of Environmental Hazards and Forest Functions

Participants consistently recognized forests' ecological roles, particularly in mitigating natural hazards such as floods, landslides, and climate-related impacts. Awareness was grounded in both personal experience and observations of environmental changes.

- P1 stated, "After some trees were cut near the stream, our area flooded. Forests act like a shield for us."
- P4 observed, "The slope became unstable when the forest was cleared, causing small landslides during heavy rain."
- P9 highlighted climate regulation: "Without trees, the temperature rises and crops fail. Forests keep our environment balanced."

Participants also connected forest functions to livelihood security, emphasizing the personal and community benefits of conservation:

- P6 shared, "We rely on the forest for firewood and food during the dry season. Protecting it means protecting our survival."

These insights support Chen and Xu [1] and Stern [4], confirming that awareness of ecological functions fosters positive attitudes toward forest conservation.

#### Theme 2: Sense of Collective Responsibility

A strong sense of communal accountability emerged as participants emphasized that forest protection is a shared responsibility.

- P3 remarked, "We cannot just wait for the barangay officials; each family must help plant trees."
- P7 stated, "The forest is for everyone. If we neglect it, the whole community suffers, not just one person."

- P10 added, "When neighbors join clean-up drives or tree planting, it motivates others to do the same."

This theme reflects how social norms, peer influence, and community engagement reinforce attitudes toward conservation, consistent with findings on social capital and civic engagement [8]. Educational programs integrating environmental topics also strengthened participants' sense of responsibility:

- P5 observed, "Teaching younger siblings about the forest made me more careful about cutting trees or throwing trash."

Thus, positive attitudes toward forest conservation are socially constructed and reinforced, not merely individual beliefs.

#### Theme 3: Commitment to Pro-Environmental Practices

Participants actively translated attitudes into behaviors, reflecting a behavioral manifestation of positive conservation attitudes:

- Tree planting and forest maintenance: P2, P5, and P8 participated in reforestation activities.
- Waste management: P1 and P4 emphasized separating waste and reducing litter near forested areas.
- Educational initiatives and knowledge sharing: P6 shared, "Environmental lessons in our language class helped me understand why every small action counts." P9 added, "Using local stories and examples about the forest in school made me care more and share knowledge with friends."

These findings confirm that educational exposure enhances ecological literacy, aligning with the Theory of Planned Behavior [5] and previous studies on environmental education's role in shaping attitudes and intentions [2, 3, 6, 7, 9].

#### Integration and Discussion

The thematic analysis highlights the interconnected nature of knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences in shaping attitudes toward forest conservation. Awareness of forest functions motivates recognition of ecological risks, collective responsibility reinforces social accountability, and education strengthens both knowledge and behavioral enactment.

- Attitudes are experiential and socially reinforced, emphasizing that knowledge alone is insufficient; social norms and peer influence are critical [8].
- Educational programs are pivotal, particularly those integrating environmental topics in language and community-based activities, which consolidate knowledge, cultivate responsibility, and encourage practical engagement [2,3,6,7,9].
- Positive attitudes, when combined with social and educational reinforcement, translate into tangible conservation actions, including tree planting, waste management, and participation in community programs.

In conclusion, fostering positive attitudes toward forest conservation requires a holistic approach that integrates knowledge dissemination, social norm reinforcement, and participatory educational interventions to cultivate sustainable behaviors and collective responsibility within communities.

### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined attitudes toward forest conservation among community residents, with a focus on how

knowledge, social norms, and educational experiences shape pro-environmental behaviors. Analysis of the ten participants' perspectives revealed three central insights:

1. **Awareness of environmental hazards and forest functions** significantly influences attitudes. Participants recognized forests as essential for mitigating floods, landslides, climate impacts, and for sustaining livelihoods. Positive attitudes were grounded in both direct experience and formal environmental education.

2. **Sense of collective responsibility** strengthens pro-environmental attitudes. Social norms, peer influence, and community engagement reinforced participants' perception that forest conservation is a shared duty, highlighting the role of communal values in shaping sustainable behaviors.

3. **Educational experiences**, including environmentally-focused language programs and local conservation initiatives, enhanced ecological literacy and motivated practical action. Participants demonstrated a commitment to tree planting, waste management, and participation in community programs, reflecting the translation of attitudes into tangible conservation behaviors. Overall, the findings underscore that **attitudes toward forest conservation are multidimensional and dynamic**, shaped by a combination of knowledge, social expectations, and educational reinforcement. These attitudes are key determinants of sustainable behaviors and collective responsibility in community contexts.

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations to strengthen attitudes and behaviors toward forest conservation:

1. **Integrate environmental education into formal curricula:** Schools and local learning programs should embed forest conservation topics into language and other subjects, using culturally relevant examples and experiential activities to reinforce ecological literacy.
2. **Promote community-based conservation programs:** Initiatives such as tree planting, clean-up drives, and monitoring of forested areas should be organized to foster collective responsibility and social norm reinforcement, encouraging residents to translate positive attitudes into action.
3. **Leverage social networks and peer influence:** Programs should involve community leaders, youth groups, and peer mentors to model pro-environmental behaviors, strengthening communal norms and sustained engagement.
4. **Develop educational materials that link knowledge to action:** Storytelling, gamification, and participatory learning strategies can make environmental concepts tangible, motivating learners to adopt sustainable practices consistently.

5. **Encourage ongoing monitoring and feedback:** Communities and schools should provide opportunities for reflection and evaluation of conservation activities to maintain positive attitudes and adapt strategies based on lived experiences and observed outcomes.

By implementing these strategies, educational institutions, policymakers, and community leaders can enhance ecological literacy, reinforce pro-environmental attitudes, and promote sustainable behaviors. Fostering positive attitudes toward forest conservation not only protects ecological services but also strengthens collective responsibility, contributing to long-term environmental sustainability and resilient communities.

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