

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: ASSESSING ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS AND ACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the levels of environmental awareness and action among university students and their engagement in environmental conservation efforts. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to gather data from a diverse sample of university students. The results indicate a varying degree of environmental awareness and action among the participants, highlighting the importance of educational and motivational factors in fostering sustainable behavior. While personal concern for the environment is a significant motivator for action, education plays a crucial role in enhancing awareness and driving engagement. The findings have implications for developing targeted interventions to enhance youth engagement in environmental conservation efforts. To harness the potential of youth in addressing pressing environmental issues, universities and environmental organizations should continue to invest in educational initiatives and support mechanisms that empower students to take meaningful actions for a sustainable future.

**Keywords:** Youth Engagement, University Students, Environment Awareness, Environmental Behavior, Environmental Conservation



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global community faces an unprecedented environmental crisis characterized by climate change, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, and pollution. In this era of heightened ecological awareness, the participation of youth in environmental conservation efforts becomes increasingly vital for mitigating these challenges and charting a sustainable future (Ardoin et al., 2020). Universities represent a unique setting where young individuals can be exposed to environmental issues and opportunities for engagement. Universities occupy a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of youths. These institutions serve as centers of education and research, offering students a unique opportunity to explore and understand complex environmental issues. Through formal academic programs, interdisciplinary courses, research projects, and extracurricular activities, universities provide a fertile ground for nurturing environmentally conscious citizens (Li et al., 2023).

Moreover, the environmental challenges confronting our planet today demand collective action and a concerted commitment to sustainable practices (Head, 2022). The younger generation or the youth holds the key to shaping the future of our environment. This cohort possesses a unique blend of passion, idealism, and technological acumen that can be harnessed to drive innovative solutions and bring about transformative change.

Youth engagement in environmental conservation is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it is the youth who will bear the long-term consequences of environmental degradation. Therefore, they have a vested interest in securing a healthy and resilient planet for their own well-being and that of future generations. Secondly, the energy and enthusiasm of youth can catalyze action and invigorate established conservation efforts. Their fresh perspectives and digital literacy enable them to harness technology and social media as potent tools for advocacy and information dissemination. Thirdly, engaging youth in environmental conservation fosters a sense of responsibility, empowerment, and environmental citizenship, instilling values that can influence their behaviors and decision-making throughout their lives.

In this context, this article aims to delve into the intricate relationship between environmental awareness, action, and the engagement of university students in environmental conservation. While the role of universities in fostering environmental awareness and action among students is apparent, there is a need for empirical research to assess the current state of youth engagement in environmental conservation within this context. This study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- To evaluate the level of environmental awareness among university students, including their knowledge of major environmental issues and their sources of information.
- To investigate the extent to which university students engage in environmentally responsible behaviors and participate in organized environmental conservation activities.
- To explore the motivations that drive students' engagement in environmental conservation and identify the barriers that hinder greater participation.
- To offer insights and recommendations for universities, policymakers, and environmental organizations on strategies to enhance youth engagement in environmental conservation.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study recruited a diverse sample of university students from different academic disciplines, ages, and backgrounds. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, including survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 200 survey participants were selected using a stratified random sampling approach to ensure representation from various academic departments and academic levels. 20 participants were purposefully selected for the interview segment from the pool of survey respondents based on their willingness to participate and their responses to survey questions, aiming for diversity in their level of environmental engagement and experiences. The entire data collection lasted four weeks from the third week of August 2023 to the second week of September 2023.

To collect quantitative data, the survey questionnaire was administered to selected participants to assess their environmental awareness, behaviors, and motivations. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions and consisted of six sections – Demographic information, environmental awareness, environmental behaviors, environmental engagement, motivations, and barriers. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in person to gain in-depth insights into the participants' environmental attitudes, experiences, perceptions, and barriers to engagement. The interview guide was developed based on the survey responses and included open-ended questions related to environmental awareness, environmental behaviors, environmental engagement, motivations, and barriers. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Quantitative data were analyzed with the help of SPSS software (version 23.0) using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. The themes were organized into a coherent narrative to provide in-depth qualitative insights.

## 3. RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistical Outcomes

Table 1 – Descriptive Analysis Results

Dimensions	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Environmental Awareness	2	5	3.78	0.86

Environmental Action/ Behavior	1	5	2.65	1.12
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#### Source SPSS Output

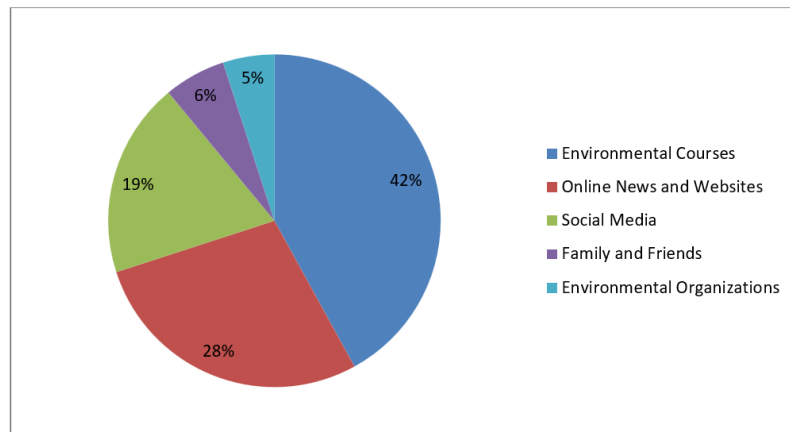
The descriptive statistical outcomes are presented in Table 1. University students have a moderate level of environmental awareness with a mean score of 3.78 and relatively consistent awareness levels across the sample with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.86. University students engage in approximately half of the provided environmentally friendly behaviors and actions, with considerable variability in participants' engagement levels, as depicted by the relatively high standard deviation of 1.12.

## 4. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Participants were asked to rate their level of awareness regarding major environmental issues on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "Not at all aware" and 5 indicating "Very aware". The survey results indicate that 163 (81.5%) university students are aware of major environmental issues, such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. However, a significant portion of respondents (35%) reported a lack of in-depth knowledge about these issues.

#### Sources of Environmental Information

Participants were also asked about their primary sources of environmental information. The figure below presents the various identified sources, along with the percentage of respondents who indicated each source:

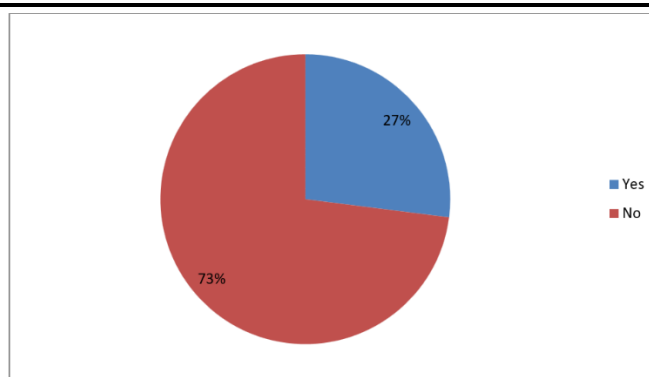


**Figure 1** Sources of Environmental Information

These results suggest that a substantial portion of university students (42%) rely on formal education, such as environmental courses, as their primary source of environmental information, while digital platforms like online news (28%) and social media (19%) also play significant roles.

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

To assess environmental action, participants were asked to indicate their engagement in various environmental-friendly behaviors, with options including recycling, energy conservation, and sustainable transportation practices. 60% of students reported engaging in at least one environmental-friendly behavior. Participants were also asked whether they had participated in organized environmental conservation activities, such as volunteering for environmental organizations, participating in campus sustainability initiatives, or attending environmental events. The results were as follows:

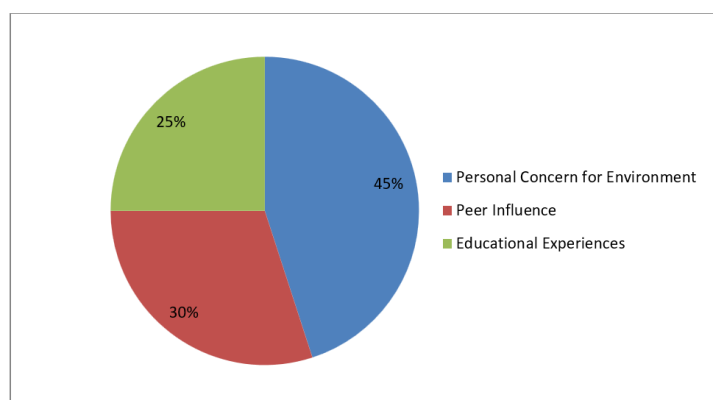


**Figure 2** Participation in Organized Environmental Conservation Activities

These findings indicate that while a quarter of the surveyed students have actively participated in organized environmental activities, a significant portion has not been involved in such initiatives.

## 6. MOTIVATIONS

Participants were asked to select their primary motivations for engaging in environmental actions from a list of options. The figure below presents the identified motivations, along with the percentage of respondents who selected each option:



**Figure 3** Motivations for Engagement

These results underscore the importance of personal concern for the environment as the most significant motivator for environmental engagement among university students (45%), followed by peer influence (30%) and the role of educational experiences (25%). Interviews provided further insight into the role of education in shaping environmental values and behaviors, with many participants citing university courses and extracurricular activities as catalysts for their engagement.

## 7. BARRIERS

While this study identifies motivations and behaviors, it also highlights challenges, such as the limited participation in organized environmental activities. Qualitative data from interviews also identified several barriers to increased engagement, including time constraints, lack of awareness of opportunities, and a perception that individual actions are insufficient to address environmental challenges. Addressing these challenges may involve creating more accessible and diverse opportunities for engagement, better communication of available initiatives, and breaking down perceived barriers (Purwandani & Michaud, 2021).

## 8. DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis and findings of this study provides valuable insights into the state of youth engagement in environmental conservation among university students. Several key points emerge from the analysis of environmental awareness, actions, and motivations, shedding light on the opportunities and challenges in fostering a culture of sustainability within the university context. The findings of this study suggest that university students have a moderate level of environmental awareness. While this suggests a foundational understanding of environmental issues, there is room for improvement. The role of universities as hubs of knowledge dissemination becomes pivotal in enhancing environmental literacy (Hoq & Akter, 2012).

The findings of this study also suggest that university students have varying levels of engagement in environmental conservation efforts. The variability in the engagement of students in environmentally friendly behaviors highlights the need for tailored interventions. While some students are actively participating in sustainable practices, others may require additional motivation and education to adopt such behaviors. This diversity underscores the importance of offering a range of opportunities for engagement (Khatibi et al., 2021).

The preeminent role of personal concern for the environment as a motivator for action underscores the importance of nurturing and amplifying this intrinsic motivation (Bouman & Steg, 2019). Fostering a sense of stewardship and personal connection to environmental issues should be central to educational efforts (Shutaleva, 2023). Peer influence and educational experiences emerge as key secondary motivators for environmental engagement. Universities can leverage peer networks and educational programs to further inspire and empower students to take action (Reimers, 2020). Creating a supportive and collaborative environment can be instrumental in this regard. These results set the stage for a deeper discussion of the implications of these findings and their relevance to promoting youth engagement in environmental conservation.

## 9. IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have three main research implications. First, Universities should continue to develop and expand environmental education programs and extracurricular activities to foster greater environmental awareness and action among students. Second, leveraging peer influence can be an effective strategy to promote environmental engagement. Peer-led initiatives and campaigns may be particularly influential. Third, efforts should be made to address practical barriers, such as time constraints, by offering flexible opportunities for engagement and promoting the idea that individual actions collectively contribute to positive environmental change.

## 10. CONCLUSION

This research paper underscores the importance of assessing and understanding the levels of environmental awareness and action among university students. It highlights the critical role of education and personal concern in motivating engagement in environmental conservation efforts. To harness the potential of youth in addressing pressing environmental issues, universities and environmental organizations should continue to invest in educational initiatives and support mechanisms that empower students to take meaningful actions for a sustainable future.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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