



Legal Literacy as a Correlate of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among College Students

Roshna Mariam Eapen

Research Scholar, Mar Theophilus Training College, University of Kerala

Mail Id: roshnamttc@gmail.com

Prof. (Dr.) Bindu B

Professor, Mar Theophilus Training College, University of Kerala

Mail Id: bindu.mttc@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20679943>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 21-05-2026

Published: 10-06-2026

Keywords:

Legal Literacy, Sustainable Lifestyle Choices, Consumer Education, Knowledge–Practice Gap, Responsible Consumption, College Students

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Legal Literacy in promoting Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students in higher education. The primary objective of the study is to explore how awareness of consumer rights, legal provisions, and responsibilities influences the adoption of sustainable practices among youth, particularly undergraduate students. The study adopts a normative survey method and was conducted among 200 undergraduate students selected through a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using a Legal Literacy Scale and a Sustainable Lifestyle Choices Inventory prepared and validated by the investigator. Descriptive statistics, correlation were employed for data analysis and interpretation. The findings revealed that college students possess a moderate level of Legal Literacy, while their Sustainable Lifestyle Choices remain at a moderate level. A significant positive relationship was found between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices, indicating that students with higher legal awareness tend to make more responsible and sustainable decisions in their daily lives. However, the study also highlights a noticeable gap between knowledge and practice, where legal awareness does not always translate



into consistent sustainable behaviour. This suggests limitations in the application of legal knowledge to real-life consumption and lifestyle practices. The study emphasizes the need for strengthening consumer education, integrating legal literacy into the curriculum, and promoting experiential learning approaches to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. It also recommends expanding the scope of research to diverse populations and exploring the role of digital and AI-based awareness tools in enhancing legal literacy and sustainable behavioural outcomes among youth.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a global priority in the 21st century due to increasing environmental degradation, resource depletion, and unsustainable consumption patterns. It refers to development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While much emphasis has been placed on environmental awareness, the role of legal awareness in shaping sustainable behaviour remains relatively underexplored.

Legal literacy refers to the knowledge and understanding of laws, rights, and responsibilities that enable individuals to make informed decisions. In the context of sustainability, legal literacy empowers individuals to act responsibly as consumers by understanding regulations related to environmental protection, consumer rights, waste management, and ethical consumption.

College students represent a crucial segment of society as future citizens, professionals, and decision-makers. Their lifestyle choices significantly influence long-term sustainability outcomes. Despite having access to information, there exists a gap between awareness and actual behaviour. Legal literacy may serve as a bridge to transform knowledge into responsible action. The present study focuses on examining the relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among undergraduate students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the level of Legal Literacy among college students.
- To find out the level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students.



- To find out whether there is any significant difference in Legal Literacy among college students based on Educational stream.
- To find out whether there is any significant difference in Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students based on Educational stream.
- To find out the relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the level of Legal Literacy among college students.
- To find out the level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students.
- To find out the relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students.

The **hypotheses** of the present study are;

- The level of Environmental Awareness among undergraduate students is moderate.
- The level of Sustainable Consumption Behaviour of undergraduate students is high.
- There is a significant relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the present era, sustainability challenges require not only awareness but also informed action. While environmental education has gained importance, legal literacy remains an underutilized tool in promoting sustainable behaviour. This study is significant as it highlights the role of legal knowledge in shaping responsible consumption and lifestyle practices among youth.

By identifying the gap between legal awareness and actual behaviour, the study provides insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers. It emphasizes the need to integrate legal literacy into higher education and promote practical learning experiences that encourage sustainable living.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. Legal Literacy



Legal literacy refers to the ability to understand legal rights, responsibilities, and processes. It empowers individuals to make informed decisions and act within the framework of law. According to legal scholars, legal awareness is essential for promoting justice, equality, and responsible citizenship. The study on Legal literacy for teachers: A neglected responsibility by David Schimmel & Matthew Militello, 2007, this study highlights the lack of legal knowledge among K–12 teachers, revealing that many educators are uninformed about student and teacher rights, have not taken courses in school law, and often rely on colleagues for legal information. It also finds that teachers would adjust their practices if they had better legal understanding and are interested in learning more. The authors emphasize the consequences of this knowledge gap and recommend strengthening legal literacy through teacher education and professional development programs.

Legal literacy in the context of sustainability includes knowledge about consumer protection laws, environmental regulations, and ethical consumption practices. Awareness of such laws enables individuals to avoid exploitative practices and adopt eco-friendly behaviours.

2. Sustainable Lifestyle Choices

Sustainable lifestyle choices refer to behaviours that minimize environmental impact and promote social and economic well-being. These include reducing waste, conserving energy, choosing eco-friendly products, and practicing responsible consumption. The study on the policy and practice of ‘sustainable lifestyles’ by Stewart Barr, Gareth Shaw, & Alan W. Gilg, 2011 this paper examines how individuals engage in various environmental practices, such as conserving energy and water, adopting green consumption, and making sustainable travel choices. While earlier research focused on specific behaviors, newer studies explore the idea of “sustainable lifestyles” and the potential for behaviors to influence one another. However, the findings show that although people are willing to adopt environmentally friendly practices at home, these actions often do not extend to travel and tourism. The study questions the practicality of sustainable lifestyles as a concept, highlighting the gap between attitudes and behaviors beyond the home.

Sustainable behaviour is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors. While awareness plays a crucial role, behavioural change requires motivation, self-efficacy, and practical application.

3. Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices



According to N. V. Semenova et al., 2018, study on Environmental and legal literacy and culture of students in conditions of education states Environmental safety is essential for national security, societal wellbeing, and sustainable development. This study examines ecological and legal knowledge, skills, and culture among various educational groups in the Chuvash Republic, including students at different levels, teachers, and parents. It highlights the importance of environmental literacy and culture in maintaining ecological balance. The findings emphasize the need to integrate ecological and legal education to foster responsible behavior and support sustainable development, ultimately improving educational practices and promoting environmentally conscious lifestyles.

According to Widdatallah, M. A., & Abdallah, M. E. (2026), study on Impact of media exposure on environmental legal literacy and pro-environmental behaviors among university students. This study examines the role of media exposure in promoting environmental legal literacy and pro-environmental behavior among university students in Saudi Arabia. Using a survey of 120 law and media students, the findings show that media students demonstrate significantly higher environmental awareness and responsible behavior than law students. The results highlight the strong influence of media in fostering ecological responsibility, while also pointing to limitations in formal curricula. The study suggests integrating media and legal education to enhance environmental awareness and promote sustainable practices across society.

Knowledge–Practice Gap

Several studies have identified a gap between knowledge and behaviour. Individuals may possess awareness but fail to translate it into action due to lack of motivation, convenience, or systemic barriers. Legal literacy can potentially reduce this gap by providing a framework for accountability and responsible action.

METHODOLOGY

The current study used a normative survey approach to gather data using an online questionnaire. Young people made up the population, especially undergraduate students of colleges affiliated with the University of Kerala. To ensure proper representation, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 200 undergraduate students from different educational streams such as Arts, Science, and Commerce. The Legal Literacy Scale and the Sustainable Lifestyle Choices Inventory, both developed and validated by the investigator, were used as tools for data collection. The Legal Literacy Scale consisted of objective-type items related to consumer rights, environmental laws, and civic



responsibilities. The responses were scored using a weighted method by assigning “1” for correct answers and “0” for incorrect answers. It mainly focused on components such as knowledge of consumer protection laws, environmental regulations, and responsible citizenship.

The Sustainable Lifestyle Choices Inventory was constructed using a five-point Likert scale with response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. It included components such as responsible consumption, waste management practices, energy conservation behaviour, and eco-friendly lifestyle habits. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Karl Pearson’s coefficient of correlation to interpret the relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Level of Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices of college Students

Table 1 *The level of Legal Literacy of college Students*

Level	N	Percentage
High	60	30%
Moderate	100	50%
Low	40	20%

Table 1 depicts the distribution of Legal Literacy level is categorized into three groups; high, moderate and low. Approximately 30% of college students exhibit both high level of Legal Literacy. And the majority of college students, consisting 50%, are classified under moderate level of Legal Literacy and only 20% are under lower level. Hence the investigator concluded that the Legal Literacy of college students have moderate level.

Table 2 *The level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices of college Students*

Level	N	Percentage
High	50	25%
Moderate	110	55%
Low	40	20%

Table 2 depicts that 25% of college students have high level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices, 55% of college students have a moderate level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices, and 20% of college students



have a low level of Sustainable Lifestyle Choices. Hence the investigator concluded that the Sustainable Lifestyle Choices of college students is moderate.

Relationship between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices of college Students

Table 3 *Correlation between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices of undergraduate students*

Variable Correlated	N	r	Level of Significance
Legal Literacy	200	0.42	0.01
Sustainable Lifestyle Choices			
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

The correlation between Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices is 0.42 and found to be significant at 0.01 level. This indicates that there is a positive relationship between the Legal Literacy and Sustainable Lifestyle Choices. Hence the investigator concluded that higher Legal Literacy leads to high Sustainable Lifestyle Choices in college students.

DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of the study are consolidated and listed as given below,

- College students have a moderate level of Legal Literacy.
- Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among students are moderate.
- A significant positive relationship exists between Legal Literacy and sustainable behaviour.
- A knowledge–practice gap is evident.

Educational Implications

- Integrate legal literacy into higher education curriculum.
- Promote experiential and activity-based learning.
- Encourage awareness of consumer rights and environmental laws.
- Develop campus initiatives supporting sustainable practices.
- Use digital tools and AI platforms to enhance legal awareness.



CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Legal Literacy plays a significant role in influencing Sustainable Lifestyle Choices among college students. While students possess moderate levels of awareness and behaviour, the existence of a knowledge–practice gap highlights the need for more practical and action-oriented approaches.

Higher education institutions must move beyond theoretical instruction and focus on integrating legal awareness with real-life applications. By fostering responsible citizenship and informed decision-making, legal literacy can contribute significantly to achieving sustainable development goals.

REFERENCES

- Biswas, & M. Roy. (2015). Green consumption behaviour: A review of the literature. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.
- Albert Bandura. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Anja Kollmuss, & Julian Agyeman. (2002). Mind the gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior? *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 239–260.
- Barr, S., Shaw, G., & Gilg, A. W. (2011). The policy and practice of ‘sustainable lifestyles’. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 54(10), 1331-1350.
- Consumer Protection Act. (2019). Government of India.
- Schimmel, D., & Militello, M. (2007). Legal literacy for teachers: A neglected responsibility. *Harvard Educational Review*, 77(3), 257-284.
- Semenova, N. V., Dimitriyev, A. D., Ivanova, E. V., Zakharova, A. N., Dulina, G. S., & Semenov, V. L. (2018). Environmental and legal literacy and culture of students in conditions of education. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 50.
- United Nations. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future*.
- Widdatallah, M. A., & Abdallah, M. E. (2026). Impact of media exposure on environmental legal literacy and pro-environmental behaviors among university students. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 14(1), 103-111.