

Article

Child Rights Protection in Vietnam's Digital Environment: The Interplay of Law, Education, and Ethics in Shaping Youth Digital Citizenship

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection of law, education, and children's rights in Vietnam in the context of digital transformation. The study aims to analyze how legal frameworks and ethics education work together to protect minors from risks in cyberspace and to build ethical and responsible digital citizenship. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the study surveyed 113 and conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 policy makers, social activists, educators, and parents who are directly involved in child protection work. Data were collected through quantitative questionnaires and qualitative thematic analysis to assess the effectiveness of current legal measures, education programs, and the level of social awareness of online safety and children's rights. The results show that Vietnam has made great progress in developing laws to protect children and promote digital competence, but there is still a gap between legislative goals and implementation effectiveness. Unsynchronized policy implementation, limited understanding of parents, and a lack of connection between moral education and digital ethics are notable issues. Interviews highlight the need for closer cooperation between schools, families, and law enforcement agencies to protect children's dignity and human rights in cyberspace. The study affirms the necessity of a model combining law and education in child protection in Vietnam, while contributing to the global forum on human rights education and ethical development in the digital age.

Keywords: Child protection, Digital citizenship, Legal education, Ethical development, Vietnam

Introduction

In the 21st century, the rapid development of digital technology and network communications has created profound changes in all areas of social life, especially for children, the most vulnerable social group, but also the central force in the sustainable development process of each country. In Vietnam, with the popularity of the Internet, social networks, and online learning platforms, children have access to knowledge and development opportunities more diverse than ever before. However, along with these opportunities are a series of new risks: invasion of privacy, cyber violence, online bullying, behavioral deviation, Internet addiction, and manipulation of moral values. This reality raises an urgent need to build a mechanism to protect children's rights in the digital environment, not only from a legal perspective but also from the perspective of education, ethics, and digital citizenship awareness.

Vietnam is an early country to ratify the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), affirming its commitment to ensuring children's basic rights, such as the right to live, develop, be protected, and participate in issues related to them. On that basis, the 2013 Constitution clearly stipulates in Article 37 that "Children are protected, cared for and educated by the State, family and society; they are allowed to participate in children's issues. Harassment, torture,



maltreatment, neglect, abuse, exploitation of labor, and other acts that violate children's rights are strictly prohibited". This provision represents a strong shift in Vietnam's perception, from the traditional concept of protection to a human rights-based approach.

Next, the 2016 Law on Children, a specialized legal document, has concretized the principles of the Constitution and the International Convention, emphasizing the right to the protection of children in the digital environment. The law clearly defines the responsibilities of the State, organizations, and individuals in preventing, detecting, and handling acts of child abuse, and stipulates the right to access safe, healthy, and age-appropriate information. However, in the face of the rapid and uncontrollable development of technology, especially artificial intelligence, cross-border social networks, and big data applications, the current legal system still reveals significant limitations in the implementation, monitoring, and coordination between child protection institutions.

In addition, the educational factor, the second factor that goes hand in hand with the law in protecting children, has not yet fully played its role. While the Law on Education and civic education programs have integrated content on children's rights, ethics, and cyber safety, the teaching method is still heavily theoretical, lacking practical experience models to help students develop ethical behavior and critical thinking in the digital environment. In particular, the lack of connection between ethics education, law, and digital skills makes it difficult for children, parents, and teachers to identify and respond to online abuse.

The reality shows that, according to reports from the Ministry of Home Affairs (formerly the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs), every year, Vietnam records thousands of cases related to abuse, bullying, or luring children over the Internet. Many cases stem from parents' lack of understanding, or from gaps in coordination between schools, law enforcement agencies, and technology platforms. In this context, the combination of a legal framework to protect children's rights and digital citizenship education has become a systematic requirement, not only helping to prevent risks but also creating a foundation for shaping children's personality, values, and responsible behavior in modern society.

Although Vietnam has achieved many remarkable achievements, there is still a significant gap between policy and practice. Legal documents are often developed at a general level, while implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of effectiveness lack coordination between authorities and educational institutions. On the other hand, social awareness of children's rights in the digital environment is still inadequate; many parents still underestimate online risks or lack the skills to guide their children to use the Internet safely. This makes children vulnerable to psychological, personality, and honor damage in cyberspace.

Based on the above situation, this study was conducted to analyze the relationship between law, education, and children's rights in the context of digital transformation in Vietnam, and at the same time, evaluate the effectiveness of child protection measures in both legal and moral education. The research objective is to clarify how the current legal system and educational mechanism jointly affect the protection of children's rights, thereby proposing a direction for building a

comprehensive protection model, combining legal corridors, value education, and community awareness.

On that basis, the study raises three key questions: To what extent have Vietnam's current legal frameworks met the requirements of protecting children in cyberspace? How is the relationship between digital citizenship ethics education and law enforcement on children's rights reflected in practice? How to build a child protection model based on the combination of law, education, and community, in accordance with the cultural and social characteristics of Vietnam in the digital age?

To answer these questions, the study used a mixed method, combining a survey of 113 people (including policy makers, social activists, educators, and parents) and semi-structured interviews with 11 people directly involved in child rights protection activities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows the researcher not only to collect objective data but also to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of stakeholders. The results are expected to provide a scientific and practical basis for improving the legal framework, education policies, and inter-sectoral coordination methods in protecting children in Vietnam. At the same time, the study contributes to the global discourse on human rights education and ethical development in the digital age, in line with the spirit of interdisciplinary, humanistic, and oriented towards comprehensive human development.

Literature Review

Overview of the domestic research situation

In recent years, along with the strong development of digital technology, many research projects in Vietnam have focused on analyzing the legal and educational aspects of protecting children's rights in cyberspace. These research results reflect the efforts of academics and management agencies in adapting to the context of digital transformation and international integration, while pointing out gaps that need to be further improved in both law and social awareness.

The study by Dang Minh Thuy and Doan Tuan Anh (2023) is one of the research projects that approaches the issue of child data protection from a legal perspective. The author argues that Vietnam has a basic legal foundation to protect children's personal data through the 2016 Law on Children and related provisions of the 2018 Law on Cyber Security. However, the enforcement mechanism is still limited, especially in determining the responsibilities of cross-border digital platforms and individuals collecting data from minor users. The work emphasizes the need to develop a specialized law on personal data protection and an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure children's privacy in accordance with international standards.

From an educational perspective, Ha Giang (2025) in the article *Human Rights Education in the Digital Age and Artificial Intelligence* pointed out that raising legal awareness and digital ethics is the foundation for protecting human rights in general and children's rights in particular. The author proposes a model for integrating human rights education into general education programs through topics on digital citizenship, cyber safety, and human values. Accordingly, education must

help children understand that freedom in cyberspace is always associated with responsibilities and legal limits, thereby forming the ability to protect themselves against anonymous risks in the digital world.

A notable empirical study is the report *Voice of Vietnamese Children* by Nguyen Phuong Linh et al. (2020), conducted by MSD Vietnam and UNICEF. A survey of more than 7,000 children and adolescents in many localities showed that about 40% of children had been exposed to harmful content or harassed online. The report affirmed that children's lack of coping skills and lack of trust in adults are the reasons why abusive behaviors are not detected in time. This work emphasizes the urgent need to combine protective laws and digital ethics education, while creating mechanisms for children to participate in policies that affect their lives (Nguyen Phuong Linh et al., 2020).

From the perspective of law enforcement, Nguyen Hoan Trung (2024) believes that the protection of children in the online environment needs to be completed synchronously in terms of legal corridors, management capacity, and social awareness. The author points out that many cases of child rights abuse have not been properly handled due to difficulties in collecting electronic evidence, limited authority, and a lack of coordination between authorities. The study recommends that Vietnam should build a separate legal framework on child information security and establish a specialized agency for child protection in cyberspace (Nguyen Hoan Trung, 2024).

Complementing that perspective, Tran Kieu Nhi and Le Thi Hong Diem (2024) analyzed in depth the right to personal information of children. The author believes that although the Law on Children 2016 has established the right to personal information protection, in reality, the collection and sharing of children's images, videos, and information on social networks is still common without an effective control mechanism. This study agrees with Nguyen Kim Phuong Trang and colleagues (2024) when they said that the biggest challenge today is the lack of coordination between management agencies, schools, and technology enterprises in ensuring children's privacy rights.

In terms of legal awareness and social behavior, Pham Dinh Khue (2024) emphasized the role of education on legal awareness and cultural behavior in cyberspace, considering this an important factor in shaping the digital personality of the young generation. Research suggests that legal education needs to be reformed in its methods, shifting from theoretical transmission to practical skills in identifying and handling situations online, thereby helping learners, especially pupils and students, to self-regulate their behavior according to ethical and legal standards (Pham Dinh Khue, 2024).

Some journalistic studies and social commentary also contribute to reflecting the urgency of the issue. Nguyen Thanh Son (2023) warns about legal responsibilities when sharing information on social networks, including unintentional acts of violating children's honor or privacy. Quang Huy (2025) affirms that protecting children on social networks needs to become a national strategy, linking education, family, and law, to prevent harmful content and strengthen community supervision.

In general, domestic studies agree that protecting children in cyberspace is an interdisciplinary issue, requiring a combination of law, education, and social ethics. However, most of the works still stop at the level of analyzing each aspect without a comprehensive model linking the legal framework and values education. This is the gap that the current research aims to fill by proposing an integrated approach, placing children at the center of the relationship between rights, responsibilities, and personality development in the digital age.

Overview of international research

Internationally, the issue of child protection in the digital environment has become the focus of research by many international organizations and scholars, reflecting global concerns for human rights in the digital age. International research works focus on clarifying two basic pillars: perfecting the legal framework to protect children's data and privacy, and developing a digital ethics education model to form responsible behavior in cyberspace.

The OECD (2020) report, *Protecting Children Online: An Overview of Recent Developments in Legal Frameworks and Policies*, is one of the most comprehensive overviews of the policies and legal frameworks of OECD member countries. The report shows that most countries have built their own regulatory systems on information security, but still lack independent monitoring mechanisms and cross-border coordination. The OECD emphasizes that child protection cannot rely on legislation alone, but needs to be supported by digital skills education programs and the participation of technology companies, thereby creating a healthy, fair, and dignified online environment.

From a human rights perspective, the United Nations (2022) affirms that the right to access the Internet has become a fundamental human right in the 21st century. This right comes with the obligation to ensure the safety and dignity of children in cyberspace. Recognizing the Internet as an essential right creates an urgent need for policy and education to help children use technology safely, creatively, and in accordance with social and ethical standards. This recognition has expanded the reach of legal and humanities education, linking digital freedom and civic responsibility.

In the *Child Protection in the Digital Age* study conducted by UNICEF (2016) in the Asia-Pacific region, the organization pointed out that children are increasingly participating in the online world from a younger age, leading to a significant increase in the risks of abuse, exploitation, and misuse of data. UNICEF recommends that countries develop comprehensive legal frameworks and integrate digital literacy, privacy, and online safety education into general school curricula. This study is considered a basis for guiding child protection policies in many developing countries, including Vietnam.

Academically, Macenaite (2017), in an article published in *New Media & Society*, proposed a shift from universal privacy protection to child-specific protection in the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The author points out the contradictions between the right to freedom of expression, the right to social participation, and the need to protect children's personal data, and asserts that children should be considered a special group with their own protection

mechanisms. This study has profound theoretical value, contributing to the formation of an international trend in protecting children's data based on the right to privacy and the right to healthy development.

Also in the field of data protection, Steeves (2022), in his *Research Handbook on Privacy and Data Protection Law*, expanded Macenaite's approach when analyzing the relationship between privacy and human dignity. The author emphasizes that children's data is not just technical information, but also reflects their identity, values, and personality in development. Therefore, any act of collecting, sharing, or processing children's data must comply with ethical and legal principles on human rights and be monitored by independent institutions.

From an educational perspective, Anderson (2021) in *Building Positive Online Communities: Education and Social Responsibility* approached the issue from a cultural and social perspective. The author argued that digital ethics education should be considered an essential part of the global citizenship training program. Building positive online communities cannot be based solely on control or punishment, but needs to create a learning environment that encourages children to practice responsibility, empathy, and mutual respect in the digital space. In another study of the same name published in the *Journal of Digital Media Studies*, Anderson continued to assert that social factors and ethical awareness play a decisive role in shaping young people's online behavior. He proposed a model of "positive digital learning communities", where teachers, parents, and students participate in establishing rules of conduct and learning based on mutual respect.

The National Academies Press (2004) study on *The Ethical Conduct of Clinical Research Involving Children*, although not directly focused on cyberspace, provides an important theoretical foundation for ethical standards when researching and intervening with children. The report emphasizes that all activities related to children must adhere to the principles of respect, beneficence, and fairness, ensuring age-appropriate autonomy. These principles continue to be widely applied in research and management of children's data today.

International works show a trend of combining data protection law and social and ethical education as two inseparable pillars in child protection. Studies by OECD, UNICEF, Macenaite, and Anderson all agree that children need not only to be protected from risks, but also to be empowered to become responsible and humane digital citizens. However, most of the current models focus on the context of developed countries, while developing countries like Vietnam still lack in-depth empirical studies on the effectiveness of integrated protection models. Therefore, analyzing and applying international research results to Vietnamese practice will contribute to filling this gap, while expanding the space for intercultural dialogue on children's rights in the digital age.

Research gaps and further research directions

An overview of national and international research shows that the issue of child protection in the digital environment has been addressed in many different aspects, from improving the legal framework to ethics education and developing digital citizenship skills. However, when comparing these two approaches, it becomes apparent that significant gaps remain in theory, practice, and approach, particularly

in the relationship between law, education, and human rights within the context of technological globalization.

First, most international studies focus on improving the legal framework on data protection and privacy for children. Scholars such as Macenaite (2017) and Steeves (2022) have made important contributions in affirming the specificity of children as a social group in need of separate protection. However, these studies are mainly conducted within developed countries, where the legal system, technical infrastructure, and enforcement capacity are relatively complete. Therefore, the conclusions and data protection models of Europe or North America cannot be directly applied to the context of developing countries like Vietnam, where social awareness, management capacity, and technological environment have fundamental differences. This gap requires localized studies that reflect the political, legal, and cultural conditions of Vietnam.

Second, many domestic studies have analyzed in depth the legal aspects related to children's rights, but mainly stopped at the level of description or single policy recommendations. The works of Dang Minh Thuy and Doan Tuan Anh (2023), Nguyen Hoan Trung (2024), or Tran Kieu Nhi and Le Thi Hong Diem (2024) all pointed out the lack of uniformity in the legal system and limitations in the monitoring mechanism. However, there is still a lack of interdisciplinary research that can link the legal framework with educational, ethical, and sociological factors to explain the mechanism of forming children's legal compliance and digital ethical behavior. This gap is especially evident in assessing the impact of ethics education and digital citizenship awareness on reducing illegal behavior online.

Third, both in Vietnam and internationally, there is a gap in empirical research with high scale and depth. Most current studies, such as the UNICEF report (2016) or the study "Voice of Vietnamese Children" by Nguyen Phuong Linh et al. (2020), only stop at the level of descriptive statistics and reflect children's opinions, without going into the analysis of the causal relationship between legal factors, ethical awareness, and social environment. The lack of quantitative or mixed models that can measure the correlation between legal policies, educational behavior, and child protection effectiveness makes policy proposals still only recommendations, lacking enough empirical basis to be applied at the national scale.

Fourth, from a theoretical perspective, many international works, such as Anderson (2021) and OECD (2020), have suggested the trend of building a model of "active online learning community" combining education and social responsibility. However, this model has not been fully studied in the East Asian cultural environment, where ethical, family, and community values play a crucial role. Vietnam, with its family- and school-centered culture, can provide a rich research context to test the feasibility of this model, thereby contributing to the global academic forum.

From the above analysis, it is possible to identify a number of further research directions that should be prioritized. First of all, it is necessary to develop interdisciplinary research combining law, education, technology, and sociology to form a comprehensive theoretical framework on child rights protection in the digital age. The next direction is to carry out national-scale empirical studies to assess the

level of legal understanding, digital competence, and ethical awareness of children, teachers, and parents. These results will be the basis for proposing an integrated model between law and education in forming responsible digital citizens. In addition, it is necessary to expand comparative research between Vietnam and countries in the Southeast Asian region to identify cultural and institutional factors affecting the effectiveness of child protection, thereby proposing a regional cooperation framework on online safety and human rights education.

Thus, it is necessary to affirm that child protection in the digital age is not only a legal or technical issue, but a global humanitarian issue. Future research directions need to transcend national and disciplinary boundaries, moving towards building a common knowledge base on human rights education, digital ethics, and international law on child protection.

Research Methodology

The study uses a mixed-method approach to ensure comprehensiveness in exploring, analyzing, and evaluating factors related to child protection in the digital environment from two aspects: law and education. This method was selected based on the characteristics of the research problem, which is both quantitative in assessing the level of awareness and behavior, and qualitative in understanding the experience, perspective, and social context.

Research design

The quantitative part was implemented through a survey of 113 participants, including policy makers, social workers, teachers, and parents of minors. The objective of the survey was to collect data on awareness, attitudes, and behaviors related to the protection of children's rights in cyberspace. The questionnaire was designed on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (Totally agree), focusing on the main content groups: awareness of children's rights, level of legal understanding, the role of digital ethics education, and the responsibilities of subjects in child protection.

Data collected from the survey were processed using descriptive statistics to determine general trends, average values, and differences between target groups. The purposeful selection of samples helps ensure the relative representation of groups directly related to child protection work, while reflecting multidimensional perspectives from many different professional perspectives.

Qualitative methods

In parallel with the survey, the study conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with individuals coded from TL01 to TL11, including policy makers, social workers, educators, and parents with practical experience in the field of child rights protection. The interview content revolved around the main topics: the effectiveness of the current legal framework, the level of coordination between competent agencies, the role of education in improving children's self-protection capacity, and practical challenges when implementing legal education or digital ethics programs.

Thematic analysis was used to process the qualitative data. The responses were coded, classified, and extracted into main themes, thereby supplementing and

clarifying the quantitative results. This approach helps to more deeply reproduce social experiences and issues that cannot be measured in numbers.

Assessment of advantages and limitations

The mixed method has a prominent advantage in allowing quantitative results to be compared with qualitative findings, thereby ensuring the objectivity and depth of the research. The combination of surveys and interviews helps to form a multidimensional view, reflecting both general trends of society and exploiting psychological and ethical aspects associated with child protection behavior.

However, this method also has certain limitations. The sample size of 113 people is enough to reflect cognitive trends, but not large enough to generalize to the whole society. Interviewing 11 people using a semi-structured method depends a lot on the experience and expressive ability of the participants, which can create subjective bias in the analysis process. In addition, factors such as region, economic conditions, or educational level have not been deeply analyzed to test their influence on the results.

Despite certain limitations, the mixed method is still considered the most suitable choice for this study. It not only provides a scientific basis for assessing the current state of child protection in the digital space in Vietnam, but also broadens the perspective on the relationship between law, education, and ethics in forming responsible digital citizens.

Research Results

Awareness of children's rights in the digital environment

Table. Assessing perceptions of children's rights in the digital environment

Order	Survey content	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean
1	Children need to be protected when participating in social networks	0.0	0.9	3.5	42.5	53.1	4.48
2	Parents have the responsibility to guide their children to use the Internet safely	0.0	1.8	4.4	38.9	54.9	4.47
3	Schools need to include child protection content in the curriculum	0.9	2.7	6.2	36.3	53.9	4.39
4	Children have the right to access safe information	0.0	1.8	7.1	41.6	49.	4.39
5	The law needs to handle acts of child abuse on the Internet strictly	0.0	0.9	4.4	32.7	62	4.56

The results show a very high level of consensus (Mean > 4.30) on the role of law, school, and family in protecting children's rights. More than 95% of respondents agree that education and supervision of Internet use is a shared responsibility. Interviews TL02, TL05, and TL10 also confirm that lack of parental knowledge is the main reason why children are vulnerable online.

Understanding and enforcing child protection laws

Table 2. Assessing understanding and enforcement of child protection laws

Order	Survey content	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	1 (%)
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1	The 2016 Law on Children is widely disseminated	7.1	20.4	38.	25.7	8.7	3.09
2	Authorities have effective mechanisms to handle violations	8.0	24.8	37.2	21.2	8.8	2.98
3	People understand children's privacy rights	6.2	19.5	42.5	25.7	6.1	3.06
4	Social media platforms comply with legal regulations	9.7	23.9	40.7	19.5	6.2	2.89
5	Coordination between schools and law enforcement agencies is still weak	3.5	7.1	23.9	45.1	20.4	3.72

The results clearly reflect the gap between legal regulations and enforcement effectiveness (Mean 3.15). More than 60% of the respondents believe that the dissemination of the Law on Children is not deep enough, while interviews TL03 and TL08 stated that the monitoring system does not meet practical requirements.

The role of ethics education and digital citizenship

Table 3. Assessing the role of moral education and digital citizenship

Order	Survey content	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	1 (%)
1	Digital ethics education is essential in the curriculum	0.0	1.8	7.1	33.6	57.5	4.47
2	Students are taught personal information protection skills	4.4	13.3	32.7	35.4	14.2	3.42
3	Teachers are trained in information security	7.1	18.	33.6	28.3	12.4	3.20
4	Propaganda activities in schools are still formal	2.7	6.2	22.1	40.7	28.3	3.86
5	Children need to be involved in the dialogue about digital rights	0.9	3.5	13.3	43.4	38.9	4.17

There is a high level of consensus on the importance of digital ethics education (Mean = 4.47), but implementation is limited. Interviews with TL01, TL04, and TL09 said that the current teaching content is mainly propaganda, lacking interactive activities to help students become self-aware of online risks.

Coordination between the state, family, and society

Table 4. Assessing the coordination between the state, family, and society

Order	Survey content	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	1 (%)
1	Family is the key factor in child protection	0.0	1.8	5.3	42.5	50.4	4.42
2	Coordination between schools and law enforcement agencies needs to be strengthened	0.0	0.9	5.3	33.6	60.2	4.53
3	Social organizations contribute to raising community awareness	0.9	3.	14.2	41.6	39.8	4.16
4	Involvement of technology enterprises is still limited	2.7	6.2	22.1	43.4	25.	3.83
5	Inter-sectoral coordination mechanism is needed in child protection	0.0	1.8	8.8	36.3	53.1	4.41

The results show a high level of consensus on the role of multi-stakeholder coordination in child protection (Mean 4.27). The majority of interviewees, especially TL06, TL07, and TL11, believe that child protection will be more effective when there is a mechanism linking law, education, and civil society organizations.

The research results confirm that Vietnam has made progress in building a legal framework and raising awareness of children's rights, but there is still a gap between policy and implementation. Both quantitative and qualitative results show that it is necessary to combine law, education, and social media to form a comprehensive child protection model in the digital age.

Discussion

Social awareness of children's rights in the digital environment

The survey results show that more than 90% of participants agree that children need to be protected when using the Internet, with an average score of 4.48 on the Likert scale. This result clearly reflects the progress in social awareness of children's rights in the digital age. Many people are deeply aware that using the Internet provides opportunities for learning and connection, but also poses serious risks such as cyber violence, image infringement, and personal data collection. The results of interviews with TL03 and TL06 show that the majority of parents and teachers are more aware of these risks and proactively seek information to guide children on safe Internet use.

However, about 7.1% of respondents still do not have full awareness of this issue, most of whom are parents in rural areas and have limited access to technology. This group of people tends to view the Internet as a means of entertainment rather than an environment for developing children's learning and social skills. The results of interviews with TL05 and TL08 show that some parents lack the skills to monitor content, leading to children being exposed to negative information or inappropriate sources. This reflects a significant gap between awareness and practical capacity to protect children in cyberspace.

When compared with UNICEF's research (2016) in the Child Protection in the Digital Age report, it can be seen that Vietnam is following the general trend of the world in incorporating the concept of "digital safety" into education policy. However, unlike countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that have implemented comprehensive digital ethics education programs early, Vietnam still mainly stops at propaganda activities, lacking a specific effectiveness evaluation mechanism. Interviews with TL01 and TL10 revealed that the main reasons were the lack of pedagogical guidance documents, the lack of a systematic training program for teachers, and limited investment resources for digital ethics education. This shows that improving pedagogical capacity and integrating digital safety education into the curriculum is an urgent requirement to strengthen social awareness of children's rights in the digital age.

The gap between law and practice in child protection

The survey results showed that only 8.7% of respondents highly appreciated the

effectiveness of disseminating the 2016 Law on Children, while 45.2% said that current legal regulations have not been applied consistently. The average score was only 3.09, clearly reflecting the gap between policy and practice. This is similar to Nguyen Hoan Trung's (2024) observation that the implementation of regulations on child protection online is overlapping and lacks a unified focal point.

Interviews TL02, TL07, and TL09 also show that regulatory agencies still have difficulty controlling harmful content, especially when foreign social media platforms operate beyond the national legal scope. This was mentioned by Macenaite (2017) when analyzing the child data protection model in the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that cross-border monitoring mechanisms are a common global challenge. Compared to that context, Vietnam is still in the early stages of establishing a personal data protection framework specifically for children, as pointed out by Dang Minh Tam and Doan Thi Anh (2023).

It is noteworthy that although there is a Decree on personal data protection, the system of sanctions is not strong enough to act as a deterrent. At the social level, only 21.2% of survey participants said that the authorities handle violations effectively. This shows that the rule of law is still limited, and coordination between stakeholders needs to be strengthened, as TL05 commented, “we have laws but lack specialized enforcement forces”.

The role of ethics and digital citizenship education

One of the notable findings is the average score of 4.47 for the statement “digital ethics education is necessary in the curriculum”. This is consistent with the research results of Ha Giang (2025), who emphasized that human rights education in the digital age must go hand in hand with civic ethics education. However, only 35.4% of respondents said that students are taught personal information protection skills, and only 12.4% agreed that teachers are properly trained. This is evidence of the situation of “high awareness but limited implementation capacity”.

Interviews with TL04, TL08, and TL11 show that high schools still view cyber safety content as an extracurricular activity rather than a core curriculum. Meanwhile, Anderson's research (2021) affirms that building positive online communities needs to start from formal education, where children are formed habits of ethical response and digital responsibility. This comparison shows that Vietnam is in a transitional phase: it has recognized the importance of digital ethics education but has not yet been able to translate awareness into policy actions and practical programs.

Coordination between the state, family, and society

The survey results reflect a high consensus on the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination, with an overall average score of 4.27. About 60.2% of participants agreed that there should be increased coordination between schools and law enforcement agencies, and 53.1% said that there should be an inter-sectoral mechanism in child protection. This view is reinforced by TL06 and TL10, who emphasized the role of social organizations and community media in raising awareness.

Compared to the OECD study (2020) on online child protection policy, Vietnam has

similarities in its inter-sectoral approach, but lacks a unified coordination framework and stable financial resources. Steeves (2022) emphasized that protecting children's privacy requires the participation of technology businesses, while only 25.6% of respondents in Vietnam agreed that businesses have a proactive role. This proves that public-private partnerships in child protection have not yet been clearly defined.

TL01 commented that current policies are still heavily administrative and do not focus on building community capacity. Meanwhile, Nguyen Kim Phuong Trang (2024) said that the lack of connection between mass media and education is the reason why children are vulnerable to misinformation. Therefore, forming a community education network with the participation of families, schools, and technology businesses is a suitable direction in the current digital transformation context.

Overall assessment and limitations of the study

The study results show that Vietnam has made certain progress in protecting children's rights in cyberspace, especially in developing the legal framework and raising social awareness. However, the gap between policy and implementation remains large, reflected in the average score of only 3.15 on legal effectiveness. The results also show that the role of moral education and digital skills for children has not been fully integrated into the formal education system.

The limitations of the study lie in the small sample size (113 people), and the geographical scope is mainly concentrated in urban areas, not fully reflecting the cultural diversity and educational level of the people. Semi-structured interviews with 11 people provided a lot of in-depth qualitative data, but were still influenced by the subjective factors of the respondents. Meanwhile, international comparative data, although valuable for reference, cannot fully reflect the differences in institutions and economic conditions between countries.

Contributions of the study

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the academic forum by pointing out the close relationship between law, education, and ethics in protecting children's rights. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the results have provided empirical evidence showing the necessity of a multi-sectoral approach to protecting children in the digital environment. These findings complement the arguments of the UN (2022) on the Internet as a fundamental human right, thereby affirming that protecting children online is not only a legal responsibility but also a human requirement of a fair and tolerant digital society.

Overall, the results and discussion of the study emphasize that in the context of digital transformation, Vietnam needs to strengthen legal institutions, promote digital ethics education, enhance multi-sectoral cooperation, and promote the proactive role of the community to form a safe and humane cyberspace for children. This is the core message in line with the interdisciplinary and humanistic academic orientation of *The Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*.

Conclusion

The growing body of research on child rights protection in Vietnam's digital environment highlights the close interplay among law, education, and ethics in shaping the digital citizenship capacity of the younger generation. A survey of 113 respondents and semi-structured interviews with 11 participants reveal a relatively high level of awareness within Vietnamese society regarding the importance of safeguarding children in cyberspace. Nonetheless, the most significant obstacle identified is the translation of legal provisions into concrete, actionable practices. This policy-to-action gap is underscored by both quantitative and qualitative data, which point to inconsistencies in policy enforcement, limited capacity for communicating legal expectations, and weaknesses in digital literacy and cyber-ethics education for children.

Further analysis indicates that coordination among key actors—state, family, school, and civil society—has not yet achieved optimal efficiency. The potential contributions of technology enterprises, social organizations, and the broader educational community remain underutilized in the creation of a safer online environment. While a solid legal framework and rising social awareness are encouraging, these advantages have not yet been fully harnessed to generate meaningful, cross-sectoral actions. Consequently, the study suggests that the transformation from policy to practice requires a strengthened inter-sectoral coordination mechanism capable of aligning legal standards with educational initiatives and cultural norms.

The study also acknowledges several limitations. The relatively small sample size and the restricted geographic and socio-demographic scope may not fully capture regional and social group differences, limiting the generalizability of the findings. As a direction for future inquiry, expanded surveys across diverse localities and social strata are recommended, alongside a more in-depth analysis of the impact of digital education policies. Additional research should examine the role of technology in protecting children's rights, with a view toward developing a comprehensive protection model that integrates law, education, and culture within a digital society.

In terms of policy implications, the findings point to the need for stronger governance structures that foster effective coordination across sectors. Establishing or empowering a cross-ministerial task force—encompassing education, justice, and information technology—with clear mandates, milestones, and accountability mechanisms could enhance policy coherence and implementation. Formal collaboration protocols with schools, families, civil society, and private sector actors, including technology firms, could facilitate data sharing, incident response, and joint risk mitigation. To support these efforts, it is crucial to improve the accessibility and communication of child-rights and online-safety regulations. Age-appropriate, multilingual materials for parents, teachers, and children, alongside public dashboards that monitor enforcement activities, platform compliance, and incident trends, would enhance transparency and trust.

Digital literacy and cyber-ethics education warrant particular attention. Integrating age-appropriate digital citizenship curricula across primary and secondary education, coupled with targeted professional development for teachers in digital safety, media literacy, and safeguarding online behavior, would strengthen preventive and response capacities. Community-level initiatives—such as libraries, youth clubs, and NGOs—can broaden the reach of these programs and reinforce protective norms. Beyond the public sector, engaging technology enterprises in corporate social responsibility initiatives to fund digital safety tools, training, and awareness campaigns could substantially augment protective efforts. Social organizations and broader civil society should be mobilized to disseminate best practices, monitor online harms, and provide timely support to affected children.

Finally, the development of a comprehensive protection model is proposed. This model would integrate legal provisions, educational strategies, and culturally resonant ethical norms, providing feedback loops for ongoing policy refinement in response to evolving digital environments. As a next step, comparative regional analyses could illuminate disparities between provinces and urban versus rural contexts, enabling more targeted policy responses. Assessing the impact of recent digital-education policies on child safety outcomes would further clarify effective approaches, while investigation into emerging technologies—such as AI moderation and parental-control tools—could reveal both opportunities and gaps in rights protection. Pilot testing of the proposed model in selected locales would allow iterative refinement before scaling, ensuring that legal, educational, and cultural components are harmonized to safeguard children in Vietnam’s digital society.

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