

INTENTION AND DECISION TO EMPLOY CHILD LABOR: THE MODERATING ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN VIETNAM'S TRADITIONAL CRAFT VILLAGES

INTENÇÃO E DECISÃO DE EMPREGAR TRABALHO INFANTIL: O PAPEL MODERADOR DA POLÍCIA NAS ALDEIAS ARTESANAIS TRADICIONAIS DO VIETNÃ

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Abstract

In traditional craft villages, particularly in developing countries, child and adolescent labor continues to account for a considerable proportion of the workforce. This study aims to explore and quantify the factors influencing the intention and decision to employ child labor from the perspective of owners and managers of traditional craft villages. Data were collected through a survey of 480 owners and managers operating in Vietnam's traditional handicraft sector. The analysis, conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, reveals that owners' or managers' attitudes, training associated with traditional preservation, financial pressure, and local labor culture exert positive effects on the decision to employ child labor through the mediating role of employment intention. Conversely, knowledge of child labor protection laws demonstrates a negative effect. Moreover, the results indicate that the degree of law enforcement serves as a significant moderating factor that weakens the relationship between intention and decision to employ child labor, emphasizing the importance of legal systems and monitoring mechanisms in mitigating this issue. These findings underscore the critical role of legal awareness and enforcement in protecting

Resumo

Em aldeias de artesanato tradicional, particularmente em países em desenvolvimento, o trabalho infantil e adolescente continua a representar uma proporção considerável da força de trabalho. Este estudo visa explorar e quantificar os fatores que influenciam a intenção e a decisão de empregar trabalho infantil na perspectiva de proprietários e gestores de aldeias de artesanato tradicional. Os dados foram coletados por meio de uma pesquisa com 480 proprietários e gestores que atuam no setor de artesanato tradicional do Vietnã. A análise, realizada utilizando a abordagem de Modelagem de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM), revela que as atitudes dos proprietários ou gestores, o treinamento associado à preservação tradicional, a pressão financeira e a cultura trabalhista local exercem efeitos positivos sobre a decisão de empregar trabalho infantil por meio do papel mediador da intenção de emprego. Por outro lado, o conhecimento das leis de proteção ao trabalho infantil demonstra um efeito negativo. Além disso, os resultados indicam que o grau de aplicação da lei atua como um fator moderador significativo que enfraquece a relação entre a intenção e a decisão de empregar trabalho



vulnerable labor groups and promoting sustainable private-sector development within traditional craft villages in developing countries.

Keywords: Child Labor Protection Law. Law Enforcement. Traditional Craft Villages. Tourism. Legal Awareness. Handicrafts. Vietnam.

infantil, enfatizando a importância dos sistemas legais e dos mecanismos de monitoramento na mitigação desse problema. Essas descobertas ressaltam o papel crucial da conscientização e da aplicação da lei na proteção de grupos de trabalhadores vulneráveis e na promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável do setor privado em aldeias de artesanato tradicional em países em desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Lei de Proteção ao Trabalho Infantil. Aplicação da Lei. Aldeias de Artesanato Tradicional. Turismo. Conscientização Jurídica. Artesanato. Vietnã.

1 INTRODUCTION

Children, as individuals who have not yet reached full physical and mental maturity, are inherently vulnerable and easily subject to violations of their fundamental rights and legitimate interests. Therefore, they represent a social group requiring special protection and priority attention. Despite this, the prevalence of child labor remains a pressing issue, particularly in developing countries, and is most commonly found in the informal or small-scale private economic sectors such as traditional craft villages. This phenomenon arises from multiple causes. On the one hand, it stems from the objective demands of the labor market, where employers - driven by short-term economic benefits - seek to exploit child labor as a means of reducing production costs and ensuring greater compliance. On the other hand, it also originates from the subjective needs of minors themselves, who, under the pressures of unemployment and poverty, accept work that is inappropriate for their age and development. Moreover, an important contributing factor lies in the inadequacies and limitations of child labor protection laws in many countries, which hinder effective enforcement and impede progress toward the gradual elimination of child labor in accordance with international conventions.

Because child labor involves a particularly vulnerable group, it has long attracted the attention of numerous scholars worldwide. Studies examining the prevalence of child labor and the factors influencing its use across different sectors have been conducted extensively, especially in developing regions such as Africa and Asia - where economies are often characterized by underdevelopment or transitional growth. This is evidenced by a series of seminal works, including those by Hilson (2010) in Ghana, Hussain *et al.*,

(2011) in India, Laraqui *et al.*, (2000) in Morocco, Kis-Katos & Schulze (2011) and Ariyanti (2016) in Indonesia, Abdallah *et al.*, (2020) in Sudan, Rad *et al.*, (2015) and Ghahremani *et al.*, (2019) in Iran, Yunusa *et al.*, (2024) in Nigeria, among others.

In the case of Vietnam - a developing country in Southeast Asia that has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and has committed to addressing this issue through its legal system, policies, and institutional framework - several studies have also explored the status of child labor and the legal framework for child labor protection. Notable among these are the works of Nguyen & Ngo (2022), Thanh (2025) and Kim & Nguyen (2021).

However, a review of the existing literature on child labor reveals several research gaps that warrant further investigation. First, in terms of research context, studies focusing on traditional craft villages - particularly in the handicraft sector - remain relatively scarce. This is noteworthy because such villages continue to employ children as part of their workforce, even though they do not constitute the majority of laborers. Second, there is a lack of empirical studies utilizing primary data collected directly from employers or managers who engage in child labor within these traditional industries. Moreover, quantitative studies employing advanced analytical techniques, such as PLS-SEM, are still limited in number and scope.

To address these gaps, the present study aims to explore and measure the factors influencing both the intention and decision to employ child labor in handicraft-based traditional villages. It also examines how the enforcement of child labor protection laws moderates the relationship between intention and actual employment decisions, from the perspective of employers and managers. These research questions guide the design and implementation of this empirical study, which was conducted among traditional handicraft villages in Vietnam. The findings are expected to provide valuable theoretical and practical implications for policymakers, labor authorities, and community stakeholders, contributing to efforts toward the reduction and eventual elimination of child labor.

2 BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background

Vietnam is a developing country in Southeast Asia with a young labor force and an economy that has undergone significant structural transformation in recent years. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report on Children and Women based on the 2023 survey and officially released in June 2025, Vietnam currently has approximately 269,604 child laborers, accounting for 1.31% of all children aged 5–17, and representing 36.85% of all working children. This implies that for every 100 working children, around 37 are classified as child laborers. The majority of child laborers (76.4%) live in rural areas, and 61.4% are boys, with most falling within the 15–17 age group, which constitutes 65.6% of the total child labor population. Child labor in Vietnam is concentrated mainly in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (38.9%), followed by industry and construction (38.3%), and services (22.8%). Most child laborers are engaged in unskilled or low-skilled occupations. Nationally, out of every 100 child laborers, approximately 56 are employed in simple manual work, 12 in personal service, security, or sales-related jobs, 14 in machine operation and assembly, and about 12 in handicrafts or related artisanal work. On average, each child laborer works 37.5 hours per week, with working hours increasing proportionally with age (GSO & ILO, 2025).

Among the total of 269,604 child laborers aged 5–17, approximately 177,840 children (65.9%) work longer hours than legally permitted. The majority of these overworked children reside in rural areas (75.0%) and are boys (61.6%). Most child laborers work during the daytime or on weekends; however, an estimated 50,100 children (18.6%) are engaged in night work between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., which poses serious threats to their health, safety, and overall development. The elimination of such hazardous forms of night work is therefore of critical importance. Survey data further indicate that in 2023, nearly 94,300 children (35.0% of all child laborers) were engaged in occupations that expose them to potential physical or psychological harm. Notably, child laborers in urban areas face a 1.5 times higher risk of being involved in hazardous work compared to those in rural areas. Moreover, approximately 32,600 child laborers (12.1%) reported suffering from at least one work-related health problem - meaning that, on average, 12 out of every 100 child laborers experience health issues, a proportion higher than that

observed among all working children. In terms of income, the average monthly earnings of child laborers were approximately 3.0 million VND per person, less than half of the average income of workers aged 15 and above (7.1 million VND per month). This finding highlights the low economic returns generated by child labor, while simultaneously underscoring the significant loss of educational opportunities and the negative effects on the physical and mental development of children compelled to work (GSO & ILO, 2025).

However, as a developing country, Vietnam's economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture and small-scale production. In particular, the private sector in Vietnam largely relies on traditional craft villages. The country currently has approximately 2,800 craft villages, some of which have preserved centuries-old handicraft traditions. Children are involved in various traditional occupations such as embroidery, jewelry making, conical hat production, furniture and fine woodcraft manufacturing, and ceramics. Overall, these traditional manual activities are often perceived as suitable for children's physical capacity and developmental stage. Most of the participating children are still attending school; those who have dropped out typically completed grades 8 or 9, corresponding to ages 14–16. There are generally two main groups of child laborers in these villages: those who work to learn a craft and those who seek additional income. On average, child laborers work 6.03 hours per day during peak production seasons and 4.08 hours per day during regular periods, with an average of 21.04 working days per month. Their wages are usually calculated based on piece-rate production. Most children work after school hours and during daytime. Production facilities are typically family-run or located close to the children's homes. However, the working conditions are often unsafe and unsanitary, characterized by cluttered machinery, cramped spaces, noise, and dust, which negatively affect both the health and safety of workers - including children - and the overall productivity and creativity of the craft industry (ILO & MLISA Vietnam, 2020). Moreover, for school-aged children, participation in labor significantly impairs academic performance, especially among female (Le & Homel, 2015).

Thus, it is evident that child labor persists not only in Vietnam but also across many countries worldwide, despite the existence and enforcement of laws and regulations designed to eliminate it. In many cases, children are preferred as a labor source because they are more easily manipulated, threatened, abused, and exploited, partly due to their lack of experience and immaturity (Aziz & Iskandar, 2013).

2.2 Literature review

Previous studies on child labor have identified a wide range of causes explaining why children continue to work despite national laws and international efforts aimed at eliminating the practice. However, the scope of this article focuses specifically on factors stemming from employers themselves - namely, the owners or managers of traditional craft villages - rather than those arising from the children or their families, government agencies, or the broader legal framework. From the perspective of employers, several key factors can be identified as follows:

2.2.1 *Economic pressure and financial conditions of traditional craft villages*

Economic pressure and unstable financial conditions are considered key factors contributing to the persistence of child labor in traditional craft villages (Huyen, 2021; Shafi *et al.*, 2021). In many developing economies, including Vietnam, owners and managers of small-scale production facilities often face fluctuating market demand, limited access to credit, and rising input costs. Within this context, employing child labor becomes a coping strategy to reduce labor expenses and sustain production activities in traditional craft villages (Bhat & Rather, 2009).

This perspective is further supported by Calmon *et al.*, (2024), who argue that when households are provided with preferential credit policies to alleviate consumption and production burdens, the prevalence of child labor tends to decrease. Based on the above analysis, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Financial pressure has a positive effect on the intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages.

H1a: The intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages positively mediates the relationship between financial pressure and the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.2 *Training associated with the preservation of traditional craft heritage*

In traditional craft villages, vocational training and skill transmission often follow a family–community model, where professional craftsmanship is passed down through

generations (Chinh, 2005). This approach is regarded as a key mechanism for ensuring the sustainable development of traditional crafts by maintaining the continuous transfer of artisanal knowledge and skills from one generation to the next (Yang *et al.*, 2018). The “learning by doing” model, while a distinctive cultural practice and an effective means of preserving artisanal knowledge, has also been identified as a contributing factor to child labor. When children are encouraged or expected to participate in production activities from an early age to “learn the trade,” the boundary between traditional apprenticeship and child labor becomes blurred. Under the economic pressures faced by small production households, children’s participation in work not only symbolizes vocational inheritance but also serves as a cost-saving strategy to sustain household livelihoods. Furthermore, limited legal oversight and low awareness of child rights within these communities often allow informal apprenticeship practices to devolve into exploitative child labor under the guise of “traditional training.” Therefore, although intergenerational craft transmission holds significant cultural value, it must be adapted to align with legal regulations and child protection standards in the context of modern economic development. Nonetheless, the process of preserving traditional values and skills through intergenerational training continues to result in the involvement of children as part of the labor force, even if not as the primary workers (Mitra, 2020). Based on the above discussion, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Training associated with the preservation of traditional heritage has a positive effect on the intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages.

H2a: The intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages positively mediates the relationship between training associated with traditional preservation and the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.3 Attitudes of owners/managers of traditional craft villages

The attitudes of traditional craft village owners toward the employment of child labor are often ambivalent, reflecting a complex intersection of economic reasoning, cultural values, and legal awareness. Many craft business owners perceive children’s participation in production as a “natural” part of the learning process, closely tied to the traditional practice of early apprenticeship and the intergenerational transmission of artisanal skills within families. From their perspective, such participation does not

constitute exploitation but rather represents a form of practical vocational education that helps children develop work-related skills at an early age (Santana & Ristum, 2025). It is also viewed as a socially responsible act aimed at preserving and perpetuating the cultural heritage and craftsmanship of the community across generations (Lancy, 2012; Chinh, 2005).

However, from an economic standpoint, many owners acknowledge that employing child labor reduces labor costs, especially under conditions of limited capital and increasing market competition. At the same time, inadequate understanding or disregard of legal frameworks concerning child labor means that some owners fail to fully recognize the unlawful nature of such practices. As a result, tolerant or rationalizing attitudes toward child labor often emerge, reflecting a complex interplay between economic benefits, social norms, and legal compliance. These attitudes significantly influence the persistence of child labor within traditional craft villages. Based on the above analysis, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The attitudes of traditional craft village owners/managers have a positive effect on the intention to employ child labor.

H3a: The intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages positively mediates the relationship between the attitudes of owners/managers and the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.4 Legal awareness of child labor protection

Employers' understanding of legal regulations concerning the protection of child labor - such as the minimum working age, permissible working conditions, and responsibilities related to safeguarding children's rights - has been found to exert a negative influence on their intention and decision to employ child labor (Baul & Ostermann, 2023). When employers possess a clear understanding of labor laws - especially provisions in the Labor Code governing minimum employment age, safe working environments, and penalties for violations - they are more likely to avoid hiring children to protect their reputation and minimize legal risks. Previous studies have consistently shown that strong legal awareness can significantly reduce the incidence of child labor. For instance, Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005) demonstrated that employers who fully comprehend the legal and ethical consequences of exploiting child labor tend to

exhibit a markedly lower intention to employ minors. Similarly, the ILO (2017) reported that awareness-raising programs on children's rights and corporate responsibilities contribute substantially to decreasing the prevalence of child labor in craft and agricultural sectors in developing countries. However, in some cases, higher legal awareness can also lead to strategic adaptation, where employers attempt to remain technically compliant with the law while informally engaging child labor under labels such as "apprenticeship" or "vocational training" This suggests that legal understanding can both deter and, in certain circumstances, indirectly rationalize child labor use. Overall, legal awareness functions not only as a guide for compliance but also as a psychological and ethical barrier, prompting employers to act more cautiously in employing children. Consequently, it plays a crucial role in mitigating child labor practices within traditional craft villages. Based on the above analysis, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Legal awareness of traditional craft village owners/managers has a negative effect on the intention to employ child labor.

H4a: The intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages negatively mediates the relationship between legal awareness and the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.5 Work culture of traditional craft villages

In many traditional craft villages, community cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions and behaviors toward child labor (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022). The early participation of children in work activities is often regarded as a natural part of the learning process and a means of inheriting traditional skills, rather than a legal or ethical violation. This perception has led to the normalization of child labor within the eyes of many workshop owners and even the broader community. According to Bourdillon (2010), in contexts where traditional values are prioritized over modern legal norms, children are frequently drawn into production chains under the pretext of "apprenticeship" or "family assistance" In reality, however, this often results in prolonged early labor. Likewise, Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005) and Emerson & Souza (2003) found that in craft-based communities, social acceptance of child labor can weaken the effectiveness of legal interventions, as employing children is not perceived as wrongful

but rather as a “moral duty” or a “virtuous tradition” In Vietnam, many craft villages still view children’s participation in production as a means of “skill development” and “generational bonding” thereby perpetuating a cultural cycle that makes the eradication of child labor particularly challenging. This community-level cultural factor not only influences employers’ perceptions but also sustains a value system that tolerates child labor, undermining governmental and social efforts to intervene. Based on the above analysis, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H5: The work culture of traditional craft villages has a positive effect on the intention to employ child labor.

H5a: The intention to employ child labor positively mediates the relationship between work culture and the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.6 Intention and decision to employ child labor

In traditional craft villages, the intention to employ child labor often serves as a critical intermediary step leading to the actual decision made by workshop owners or managers. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991), an individual’s behavior can be most accurately predicted by their behavioral intention, which is shaped by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. When craft village owners perceive the employment of children as a normal, culturally appropriate, and economically beneficial practice, they are more likely to develop a stronger intention to employ child labor - an intention that directly translates into actual decisions in practice. Empirical studies such as those by Omokhodion & Omokhodion (2004), Sahoo (2021), Abdul Hai *et al.*, (2010) and Dash (2013) have shown that in contexts characterized by weak legal enforcement and high economic pressure, the intention to use child labor easily transforms into actual behavior. This phenomenon is particularly evident in traditional craft villages, where the notion of “learning by doing from a young age” is deeply ingrained in the production culture. Thus, intention to employ child labor not only reflects employers’ perceptions and attitudes but also serves as the most direct and powerful predictor of their actual decision to employ children, especially in socio-cultural contexts typical of developing countries’ traditional craft sectors. Based on the above analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

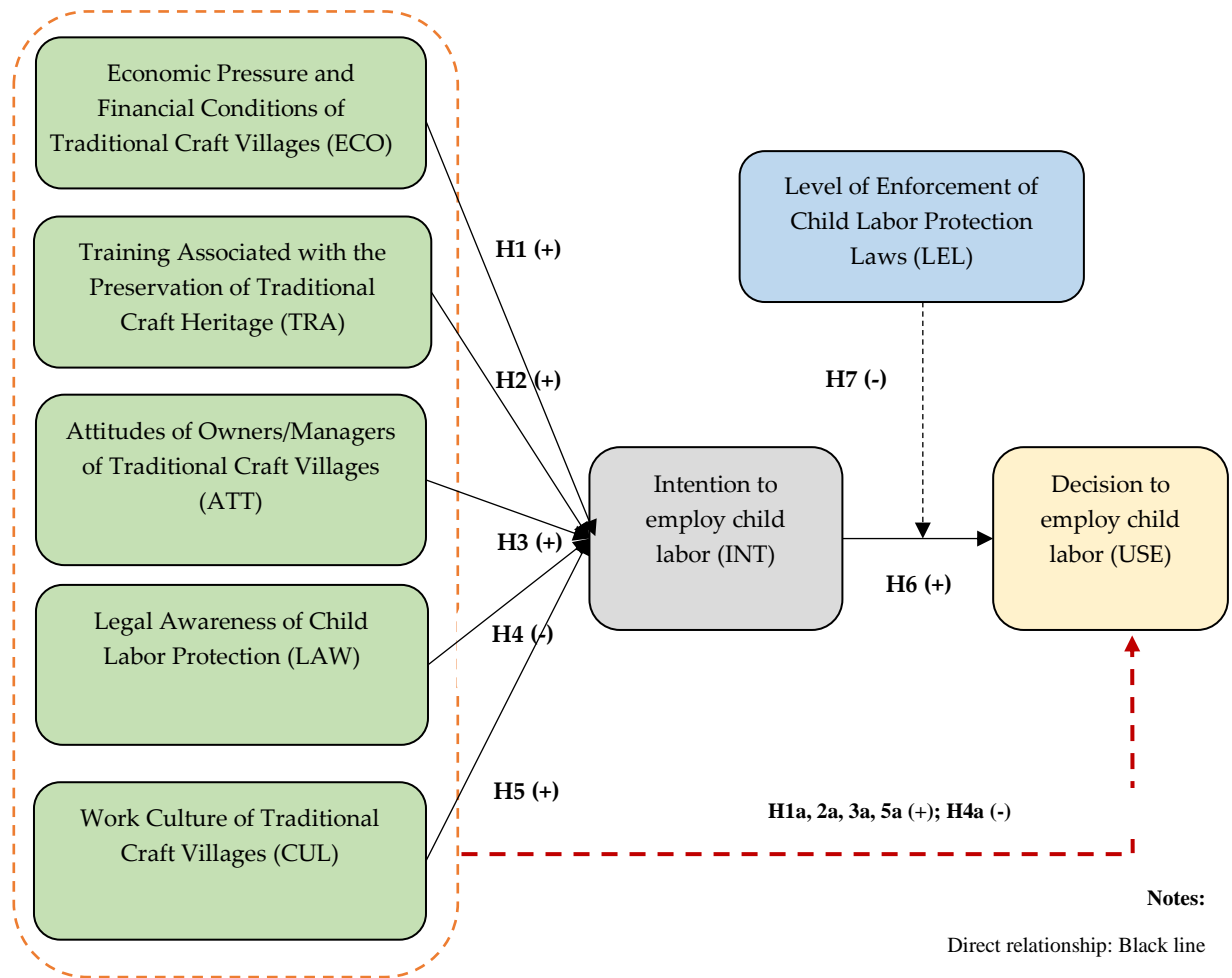
H6: Intention to employ child labor has a positive effect on the decision to employ child labor.

2.2.7 The level of enforcement of child labor protection laws

In the context of traditional craft villages, the level of enforcement of child labor protection laws serves as a crucial moderating factor that mitigates the strength of the relationship between employers' intention and their actual decision to use child labor (Wijayanti, 2017). Although intention is often the most direct and powerful predictor of behavior, the presence of a strict and transparent legal enforcement mechanism can cause individuals with an existing intention to hesitate or alter their decision during implementation. When legal regulations are rigorously enforced, with clear sanctions and active monitoring, the heightened risk of legal penalties discourages factory owners from violating the law, even if their initial intention remains unchanged (Baul & Ostermann, 2023). According to Yusefri *et al.*, (2024), in areas where labor authorities operate proactively - with frequent inspections and strong coordination between local governments and social organizations - the effect of intention on actual child labor employment decreases significantly. Conversely, when law enforcement is weak, oversight is minimal, and sanctions are inconsistently applied, this relationship becomes stronger, allowing intention to more easily translate into real behavior. Therefore, law enforcement not only ensures compliance but also functions as a behavioral control mechanism, helping to disrupt the cycle of child labor rights violations in traditional craft villages. Based on the above analysis, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H7: The level of enforcement of child labor protection laws serves as a moderating factor that weakens the linkage between the intention to employ and the actual decision to employ child labor

Building on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the influence of key factors on employers' decisions to use child labor, with the intention to employ child labor serving as a mediating variable in the context of traditional craft villages. Furthermore, the study investigates the moderating effect of the level of enforcement of child labor protection laws on the relationship between intention and actual decision to employ child labor among owners of traditional handicraft villages in Vietnam. The proposed theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Model and Hypotheses***3 METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted under the ethical approval and research assignment of the University of Law, Hue University, with project code DHH2023-12-73, as stated in Decision No. 2060/QĐ-DHH dated December 19, 2022. The research procedure followed a systematic sequence of steps, including: (1) reviewing the theoretical background and developing the initial research model and hypotheses; (2) conducting in-depth expert interviews and focus group discussions to refine the model and measurement scales; (3) carrying out a pilot survey to assess the reliability of the measurement scales and finalize the official questionnaire; (4) conducting the main quantitative survey, including data

collection, screening, processing, and analysis; and (5) discussing research findings and deriving implications.

Step 1: Development of the initial research model and hypotheses

As presented in the previous section, the theoretical research model was developed based on a comprehensive review of prior studies. Grounded in Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, the proposed model (illustrated in Figure 1) consists of five independent variables, one mediating variable, one dependent variable, and one moderating variable. The measurement scales were adapted from previous studies, including GSO & ILO, (2025), ILO & MLISA Vietnam, (2020), Chinh (2005), Baul & Ostermann (2023), Omokhodion & Omokhodion (2004) and Sahoo (2021), among others.

Step 2: Expert interviews and focus group discussions for refining the research model and measurement scales

Based on the initial research model, hypotheses, and draft measurement scales, a panel of ten experts was purposively selected and divided into two groups to evaluate and refine both the model and the measurement instruments. Group 1 consisted of five academic experts holding doctoral degrees or higher, who have been teaching subjects related to child labor protection laws and women's rights for more than 15 years. Group 2 included five artisan experts currently serving as managers and executive members of the Vietnam Handicraft Village Association, each with over 20 years of professional experience. The experts participated in semi-structured interviews to discuss in depth the proposed constructs and measurement items in the research model. Their participation was entirely voluntary, confirmed through signed consent forms. The research team, in return, committed to maintaining confidentiality and using the collected information solely for research purposes. The results of the expert interviews and focus group discussions led to several modifications, adjustments, and additions to the content of the measurement scales, thereby improving their clarity and contextual relevance to the traditional craft village setting.

Step 3: Pilot survey to assess the reliability of the measurement scales and finalize the official questionnaire

To verify the reliability of the questionnaire after revisions based on expert interviews and focus group discussions, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of 100 respondents. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software, employing

Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to evaluate the reliability and construct validity (convergent validity) of the measurement scales. The results of the pilot study indicated that all observed variables were valid and met the reliability thresholds, confirming that the measurement scales were appropriate for conducting the official large-scale survey. The detailed content of the final measurement scales is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Measurement Summary

Symbol	Scales	Sources
Economic Pressure and Financial Conditions of Traditional Craft Villages (ECO)		
ECO1	The income/revenue situation of the craft village has compelled me to seek cheaper sources of labor.	
ECO2	The cost of hiring adult workers currently poses a financial burden on the craft village.	Huyen (2021), Shafi <i>et al.</i> , (2021), Bhat & Rather (2009), GSO & ILO (2025), Expert opinion, Author's development
ECO3	During the peak production season, I need to increase the workforce even if it includes child labor.	
ECO4	A lack of working capital/cash flow has led me to consider employing underage workers for certain tasks in the craft village.	
ECO5	Hiring children is sometimes a means to sustain operations during financial difficulties faced by the craft village.	
Training Associated with the Preservation of Traditional Craft Heritage (TRA)		
TRA1	Passing down craft skills to the next generation (children, grandchildren, etc.) is an important part of the village's cultural tradition.	
TRA2	Children often participate in family work to learn the craft from an early age.	Chinh (2005), Yang <i>et al.</i> , (2018), Mitra (2020), Expert opinion, Author's development
TRA3	Allowing children to take part in production is seen as a way to preserve the craft skills of the traditional village.	
TRA4	In the craft village, it is generally expected that children will learn the craft within their family or household production unit.	
TRA5	I believe that involving children in production is necessary to pass on craft skills to future generations.	
Attitudes of Owners/Managers of Traditional Craft Villages (ATT)		
ATT1	I believe that children can perform simple tasks effectively.	
ATT2	I think that children are easier to train and more loyal to their work.	
ATT3	I do not consider hiring underage workers to be wrong in the context of traditional craft villages.	Santana & Ristum (2025), Lancy (2012), GSO & ILO (2025), Expert opinion, Author's development
ATT4	I believe that the economic benefits of employing child labor outweigh the potential risks.	
ATT5	I am willing to take responsibility for involving children in production for the sake of craft transmission.	
Work Culture of Traditional Craft Villages (CUL)		
CUL1	Most people in the craft village accept the participation of children in labor activities.	
CUL2	I feel expected to let my children or grandchildren work to learn the craft.	Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), Emerson & Souza (2003), Expert opinion, Author's development
CUL3	If I do not allow children to participate in production, I may be perceived as not maintaining the village tradition.	
CUL4	In the community, it is considered normal for children to be involved in production activities.	
CUL5	Pressure from neighbors or relatives influences my decision to employ child workers.	
Legal Awareness of Child Labor Protection (LAW)		

Symbol	Scales	Sources
LAW1	I am well aware of the current laws related to the use of child labor (e.g., minimum working age, working conditions).	ILO & MLISA Vietnam (2020), ILO (2017), Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), Expert opinion,
LAW2	I understand the legal consequences of employing workers below the lawful working age.	
LAW3	I know the fundamental rights that the law protects for working children.	
LAW4	I believe that violating child labor laws can result in financial or legal consequences for the business.	
Intention to employ child labor (INT)		
INT1	I am likely to hire workers under the age of 18 for my craft village within the next 12 months.	Expert opinion, Author's development
INT2	I am willing to employ minors if suitable adult workers are unavailable.	
INT3	I plan to use underage workers for simple tasks (e.g., sorting, packaging).	
INT4	I believe that hiring minors helps my craft village maintain operational costs.	
Decision to employ child labor (USE)		
USE1	In the past 12 months, my craft village has employed at least one worker under the age of 18.	Expert opinion, Author's development
USE2	Children are currently involved in certain stages of production in my craft village.	
USE3	Children from my family or the community often assist with tasks at the workshop or production site.	
USE4	The use of underage labor is a regular practice in my craft village.	
USE5	I have allowed or encouraged children to participate in production activities.	
Level of Enforcement of Child Labor Protection Laws (LEL)		
LEL1	The authorities regularly inspect and monitor craft villages that employ child labor.	Baul & Ostermann, (2023), Yusefri <i>et al.</i> , (2024), Expert opinion, Author's development
LEL2	Violations of child labor regulations are often detected and strictly sanctioned.	
LEL3	My craft village has a clear understanding of the penalties for violating child labor laws.	
LEL4	The enforcement of child labor protection laws is carried out fairly and transparently.	

Step 4: Formal Quantitative Survey, Data Collection, Screening, Processing, and Analysis

The official questionnaire was designed based on the measurement scales presented in Table 1 and then implemented through an online Google Form survey. To collect primary data, a 7-point Likert scale was employed because of its higher measurement precision for PLS-SEM analysis, with a recommended minimum sample size exceeding 200 respondents (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The scale ranged from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree.

With the support of the Vietnam Association of Craft Villages, the research team obtained a list and contact information of owners or managers of traditional handicraft villages across the three regions of Vietnam—North, Central, and South. One representative (either the owner or manager) from each village was invited to participate in the survey. A convenient sampling approach was used, with 200 villages selected from each region (a total of 600 villages invited). Between December 2023 and June 2025, 500 out of 600 craft villages completed the questionnaire, achieving a response rate of 83.3%.

After screening and removing 20 invalid responses, 480 valid questionnaires were retained for data processing and analysis using SmartPLS software. The detailed demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 2. Specifically, female respondents accounted for 59.2% of the total, while 57.9% of participants held an education level below university degree. In terms of age, 57.2% were over 46 years old. Regarding work position, 75% of respondents were village owners, and 25% were managers of traditional handicraft villages.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics about the samples

Information of samples	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	N = 480	100
Male	196	40.8
Female	284	59.2
Degree Status	N = 480	100
Undergraduate	278	57.9
Bachelor or equivalent	176	36.7
Postgraduate	26	5.4
Status position	N = 480	100
Owners of Traditional Craft Villages	360	75
Managers of Traditional Craft Villages	120	25
Age	N = 480	100
From 18 to under 24 years	27	5.6
From 25 to under 35 years	82	17.0
From 36 to under 45 years	97	20.2
Over 46 years	202	57.2

The research team employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to analyze the collected data following the two-step procedure proposed by Henseler *et al.* (2015), which includes: (1) assessment of the measurement model, and (2) evaluation of the structural model. This method was selected due to the complexity of the research framework, which involves both mediating and moderating variables (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Step 5: Data Analysis, Discussion, and Implications

Based on the results derived from the PLS-SEM analysis, the study conducted a comparative examination of the findings with those of previous research to identify consistencies and divergences. From this comparison, theoretical and practical implications were drawn to provide insights and recommendations for relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, local authorities, and managers of traditional craft villages.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Assessment of the measurement model

The measurement model was evaluated using SmartPLS following the procedure recommended by Hair *et al.* (2014). The assessment focuses on the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the latent constructs. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed through several steps, including: (1) examination of multicollinearity, (2) evaluation of the coefficient of determination (R^2), (3) assessment of effect size (f^2), (4) evaluation of predictive relevance (Q^2), and (5) testing of the path coefficients among constructs.

The reliability of the measurement model was assessed through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR). According to Hu & Bentler (1999), these values should be greater than or equal to 0.7. Convergent validity was examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should exceed 0.5 as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). Based on the analysis results presented in Table 3, all observed items exhibited outer loadings ranging from 0.716 to 0.899, exceeding the 0.7 threshold, indicating strong indicator reliability. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.828 to 0.901, and Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.836 to 0.904, all above 0.7, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency. The AVE values ranged from 0.592 to 0.776, surpassing the 0.5 criterion. Therefore, it can be concluded that all measurement scales used in this study exhibit adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, internal reliability and convergent reliability

Constructs	Items	Outer Loading	Mean	Cronbach's Alpha	C.R	AVE
Economic Pressure and Financial Conditions of Traditional Craft Villages (ECO)	ECO1	0.842	3.698	0.868	0.877	0.654
	ECO2	0.794	3.496			
	ECO3	0.821	3.746			
	ECO4	0.770	3.735			
	ECO5	0.814	3.725			
Training Associated with the Preservation of Traditional Craft Heritage (TRA)	TRA1	0.803	4.758	0.828	0.836	0.592
	TRA2	0.716	4.673			
	TRA3	0.777	4.608			
	TRA4	0.783	4.648			
	TRA5	0.764	4.704			
	ATT1	0.758	4.696	0.837	0.844	0.605
	ATT2	0.770	4.302			

Constructs	Items	Outer Loading	Mean	Cronbach's Alpha	C.R	AVE
Attitudes of Owners/Managers of Traditional Craft Villages (ATT)	ATT3	0.788	4.402	0.890	0.894	0.694
	ATT4	0.822	4.417			
	ATT5	0.750	4.356			
Work Culture of Traditional Craft Villages (CUL)	CUL1	0.825	3.877			
	CUL2	0.827	3.908			
	CUL3	0.841	3.877			
	CUL4	0.849	3.877			
	CUL5	0.822	3.858			
Legal Awareness of Child Labor Protection (LAW)	LAW1	0.842	4.656			
	LAW2	0.858	4.740			
	LAW3	0.845	4.698			
	LAW4	0.828	4.652			
Intention to employ child labor (INT)	INT1	0.874	4.756			
	INT2	0.888	4.731			
	INT3	0.884	4.794			
	INT4	0.878	4.804			
Decision to employ child labor (USE)	USE1	0.802	4.769			
	USE2	0.824	4.783			
	USE3	0.813	4.808			
	USE4	0.824	4.823			
	USE5	0.858	4.823			
Level of Enforcement of Child Labor Protection Laws (LEL)	LEL1	0.899	5.138			
	LEL2	0.873	5.198			
	LEL3	0.874	5.142			
	LEL4	0.867	5.125			

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted

To assess discriminant validity among the constructs, the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) criterion proposed by Henseler *et al.* (2015) was employed, with the threshold value set at 0.85. As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values between construct pairs were below 0.85, indicating that discriminant validity was satisfactorily established for all measurement scales.

Table 4

The HTMT ratios between construct pairs

Constructs	ATT	CUL	ECO	INT	LAW	LEL	TRA	USE
ATT								
CUL	0.255							
ECO	0.356	0.145						
INT	0.545	0.280	0.448					
LAW	0.199	0.127	0.223	0.398				
LEL	0.338	0.181	0.203	0.596	0.077			
TRA	0.255	0.141	0.208	0.444	0.238	0.232		
USE	0.522	0.353	0.482	0.744	0.405	0.272	0.403	

3.2 Evaluation of the Structural Model (PLS-SEM)

To evaluate the structural model in PLS-SEM, it is essential to examine potential multicollinearity, assess model fit with the collected data, and evaluate the model's predictive power. According to Hu & Bentler (1999), the Inner VIF values should be less than 3, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) should be below 0.075. Furthermore, higher values of R^2 (coefficient of determination) and Q^2 (predictive relevance) indicate that the model has greater explanatory and predictive capability (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Based on the results presented in Table 4, the Inner VIF values ranged from 1.069 to 1.415 (< 3), and the SRMR value was 0.043 (< 0.075). These results confirm that the model does not suffer from multicollinearity and demonstrates a satisfactory fit with the empirical data. The R^2 values of 0.421 and 0.474 indicate that approximately 42.1% of the variance in the intention to employ child labor and 47.4% of the variance in the decision to employ child labor are explained by the independent variables included in the model.

Regarding the effect size (f^2), the results in Table 5 show the relative strength of the relationships among constructs. Following Cohen's (1988) criteria, the findings indicate that the labor culture of traditional craft villages has an insignificant impact on the intention to employ child labor (CUL \rightarrow INT; $f^2 = 0.018 < 0.02$). Meanwhile, other factors such as economic pressure, training associated with cultural preservation, attitude of the owner or manager, and legal awareness of child labor protection show small effects on the intention to employ child labor (ECO, TRA, ATT, LAW \rightarrow INT; f^2 ranging from 0.028 to 0.135 < 0.15). However, the intention to employ child labor exerts a large and substantial effect on the decision to employ child labor in traditional craft villages (INT \rightarrow USE; $f^2 = 0.741 > 0.35$).

Table 5

Results of the Structural Model Evaluation

Constructs/ Path	Inner VIF	f^2	R^2	R^2 adjusted	Q^2
INT			0.421	0.415	0.322
USE			0.474	0.471	0.316
ATT \rightarrow INT	1.182	0.135			
CUL \rightarrow INT	1.066	0.018			
ECO \rightarrow INT	1.141	0.070			

Constructs/ Path	Inner VIF	f ²	R ²	R ² adjusted	Q ²
INT -> USE	1.415	0.741			
LAW -> INT	1.081	0.067			
TRA -> INT	1.096	0.085			
LEL x INT -> USE	1.069	0.028			

To examine both the direct and indirect relationships among the proposed hypotheses, the path coefficients and p-values were used for evaluation. In order to generalize the findings to the population, the model's reliability was further verified using the Bootstrap resampling method with 5,000 iterations (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 6 and Figure 2 as follows.

Table 6

Testing Direct and Indirect Effects

Path	Hypothesis	Original sample	Standard deviation	P values	Confidence interval		Decision on hypothesis
					2.5%	97.5%	
<i>Total direct effects</i>							
ATT -> INT	H3	0.304	0.037	0.000	0.233	0.378	Accept
CUL -> INT	H5	0.105	0.033	0.001	0.044	0.171	Accept
ECO -> INT	H1	0.215	0.039	0.000	0.140	0.291	Accept
INT -> USE	H6	0.742	0.030	0.000	0.681	0.799	Accept
LAW -> INT	H4	-0.205	0.038	0.000	-0.277	-0.130	Accept
TRA -> INT	H2	0.232	0.037	0.000	0.163	0.306	Accept
LEL x INT -> USE	H7	-0.132	0.038	0.000	-0.206	-0.058	Accept
<i>Total indirect effects</i>							
LAW -> INT -> USE	H4a	-0.152	0.030	0.000	-0.210	-0.095	Accept
TRA -> INT -> USE	H2a	0.172	0.028	0.000	0.119	0.229	Accept
ATT -> INT -> USE	H3a	0.226	0.029	0.000	0.170	0.285	Accept
ECO -> INT -> USE	H1a	0.159	0.030	0.000	0.102	0.218	Accept
CUL -> INT -> USE	H5a	0.078	0.025	0.002	0.032	0.130	Accept

The results presented in Table 6 and Figure 2 indicate that, in descending order of influence on the intention to employ child labor in traditional craft villages, the most significant factors are: owners' or managers' attitudes ($\beta = 0.304^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.135$), training associated with traditional preservation ($\beta = 0.232^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.085$), economic and financial pressure ($\beta = 0.215^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.070$), legal awareness of child labor protection ($\beta = -0.205^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.034$, showing a negative relationship), and labor culture ($\beta = 0.105^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.018$). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are all supported.

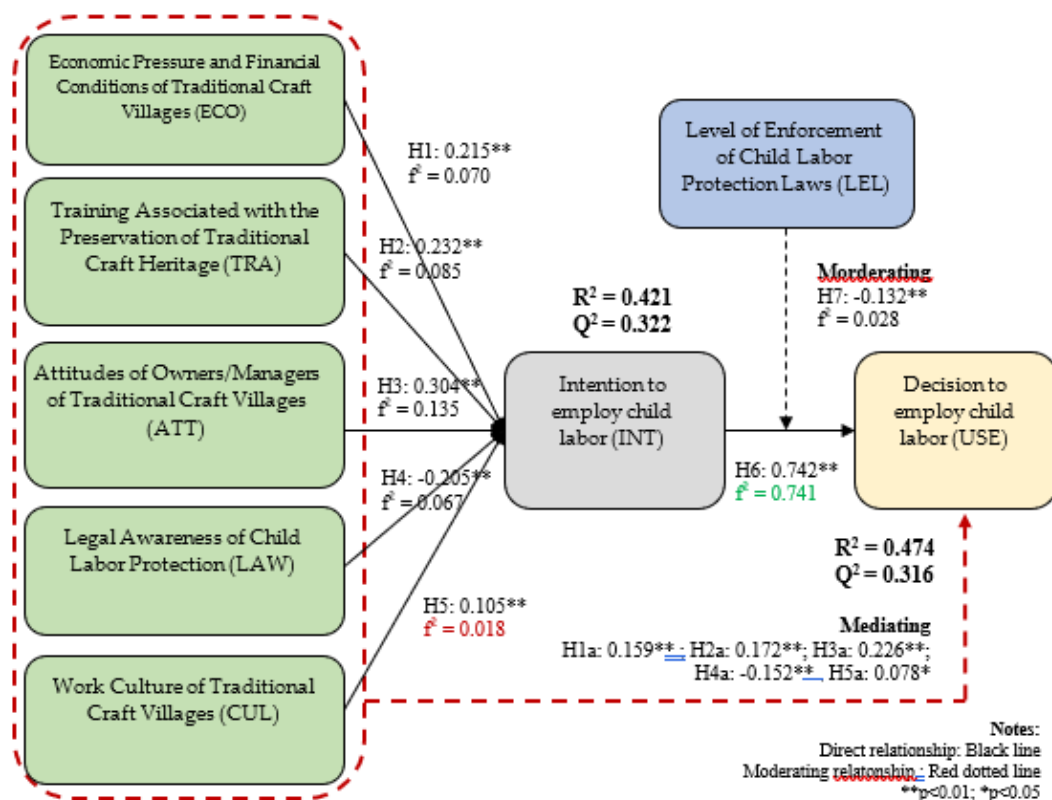
Moreover, the results demonstrate that the intention to employ child labor has a strong positive effect on the decision to employ child labor from the perception of craft

village owners or managers ($\beta = 0.742^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.741$), supporting hypothesis H6. The findings also confirm that hypothesis H7, concerning the moderating variable, is supported. Specifically, the level of law enforcement on child labor protection negatively moderates and weakens the relationship between intention and decision to employ child labor in traditional craft villages, although this moderating effect is relatively small ($\beta = -0.132^{**}$, $f^2 = 0.028$).

In addition, the Bootstrap results ($n = 5,000$) show that the independent variables (ATT, CUL, ECO, LAW, TRA) have significant indirect effects on the decision to employ child labor through the mediating role of intention. The corresponding β coefficients, p-values, and f^2 effect sizes confirm that hypotheses H1a, H2a, H3a, H4a, and H5a are all supported.

Figure 2

Results of the PLS-SEM Structural Model Assessment



4 DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that, from the perspective of owners and managers of traditional handicraft villages in Vietnam, the use of child labor remains relatively prevalent and is influenced by various psychological, social, and economic factors. Specifically, the attitudes of owners/managers, along with factors such as training associated with traditional preservation, financial pressure, and communal labor culture, were found to have positive effects on the decision to employ child labor, mediated through the intention to use child labor. These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies by Bourdillon (2010), Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005) and Emerson & Souza (2003), which suggest that within traditional production communities, the use of child labor tends to be socially normalized and intertwined with vocational values, household economic needs, and local cultural identity. This reflects the intersection of cultural–social, economic, and legal–perceptual dimensions within the operational structure of craft villages. Furthermore, the results indicate that the attitude of the owner or manager exerts the strongest influence on the intention and, consequently, on the decision to employ child labor.

When owners perceive child participation in work as “apprenticeship” or a form of “skill transmission” they are more likely to form intentions and engage in such behavior. This finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that a positive attitude toward a behavior is the strongest predictor of the intention to perform it. It also resonates with the conclusions of Bourdillon (2010) and Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), who found that in South Asian and African craft communities, positive social attitudes toward child labor have normalized the practice and weakened state enforcement efforts.

Meanwhile, the factor of training linked to the preservation of traditional crafts was found to have a significant positive impact on both the intention and the actual decision to employ child labor. This reflects the reality that in craft villages, “teaching children the trade from an early age” is not only an economic necessity but is also regarded as an integral part of the cultural transmission of skills, helping to maintain artisanal craftsmanship across generations. These findings are consistent with the observations of ILO & MLISA Vietnam (2020), GSO & ILO (2025) and ILO (2017), which highlight that in developing countries such as Vietnam, linking child labor to

vocational training represents a major barrier to eliminating child labor, often justified under the pretext of “traditional vocational education. However, the present study adds nuance by confirming the dual role of this factor - it simultaneously serves the purpose of cultural preservation and acts as a driver for maintaining child labor practices, underscoring the tension between socioeconomic development and child rights protection.

In addition, consistent with previous studies, financial pressure continues to be a factor positively associated with the use of child labor. Yet, in the context of Vietnam’s traditional craft villages, this factor is neither the sole nor the strongest determinant; it typically interacts with owner/manager attitudes and occupational culture to shape behavior. When labor costs rise, children, often regarded as a cheap and readily available source of labor within households, become a temporary economic solution, particularly during periods of low product demand. This aligns with the findings of Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005) and Emerson & Souza (2003), which indicate that fluctuations in household income are closely linked to the decision to engage children in work at an early age.

According to the findings of this study, village craft culture was identified as a significant factor influencing the use of child labor. In traditional production communities, the early engagement of children in work is often perceived as a manifestation of “diligence” and “learning the trade from a young age” - values that are highly esteemed. This finding is consistent with the research of Abdullah *et al.*, (2022) and Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), which suggest that cultural norms and community perceptions can undermine the effectiveness of legal policies, as violations are not regarded as morally wrong. What distinguishes this study is that craft culture not only legitimizes the behavior but also exerts an indirect influence through the intention to employ children, indicating that cultural factors are not merely a contextual background but constitute an integral structural component of the decision-making process.

In contrast, knowledge of child labor protection laws exerts a negative influence on the decision to employ child labor. This result is fully consistent with Baul & Ostermann (2023) and ILO (2017), which highlight that legal awareness serves as a cognitive barrier that reduces the likelihood of violations. The more clearly craft village owners understand sanctions, legal consequences, and the potential negative social impacts, the more cautious they become in making decisions regarding child labor. This

finding reinforces the role of legal education and awareness-raising as a non-economic but effective measure for preventing child labor.

A notable contribution of this study is that empirical data analysis revealed that the enforcement of child labor protection laws plays a moderating role in reducing the strength of the influence from intention to the actual decision to employ child labor in traditional craft villages. This finding extends Ajzen's (1991) model by incorporating an external control factor, namely institutional pressure and monitoring mechanisms. When legal regulations are strictly enforced, craft village owners, even if they intend to employ children, refrain from actual behavior due to concerns about legal risks or potential damage to community reputation. This result aligns with previous studies such as ILO (2017), ILO & MLISA Vietnam (2020) and GSO & ILO (2025), which confirm that law enforcement is the most effective tool to prevent the translation of intention into actual child labor practices. This is further reflected in the continuous decline of child labor rates in Vietnam, as indicated by national-scale surveys conducted between 2018 and 2023 (data officially released in June 2025).

Therefore, the findings of this study provide additional scholarly evidence showing that the use of child labor in traditional craft villages in developing countries like Vietnam is influenced not only by economic factors but also by an interwoven system of social values, cultural norms, and legal awareness. Addressing this issue thus requires comprehensive policy measures that combine awareness-raising, livelihood improvement, and strengthened law enforcement to mitigate the drivers of child labor behavior. Such an integrated approach is essential for sustainable reduction and eventual elimination of child labor in craft village settings.

Although this study provides valuable empirical evidence on the factors influencing the intention and decision to employ child labor in traditional craft villages in Vietnam, several limitations should be considered for future research.

First, the study primarily relies on data collected from 480 owners or managers of traditional craft villages. Consequently, the findings mainly reflect the perspectives of the employers, without capturing the perceptions of other stakeholders such as working children, their families, or local authorities. Including these groups in future studies could offer a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of child labor practices in the craft village context.

Second, the data were collected using a cross-sectional quantitative design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Future research could adopt mixed-methods approaches or longitudinal studies to verify causal links and examine changes in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of village owners over time.

Third, the scope of this study is limited to traditional craft villages in Vietnam, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other types of craft villages (e.g., agricultural, food processing, or textile villages) or different cultural contexts. Future research could expand the geographical scope, compare regions within Vietnam, or even include other developing countries with similar characteristics to assess differences in the influence of cultural and legal factors.

Finally, this study only considers the moderating role of law enforcement, while other potential factors - such as community awareness, the role of social organizations, or the impact of government intervention programs—have not been deeply analyzed. Therefore, future research should extend the model by integrating institutional and social variables to better understand the mechanisms influencing the decision to employ child labor in the specific context of traditional craft villages.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the use of child labor in traditional craft villages in Vietnam remains a persistent phenomenon, rooted in the interplay of cultural, economic, and employer-related cognitive factors. Specifically, the attitudes of village owners or managers, training activities linked to the preservation of traditional skills, financial pressures, and the craft village labor culture all positively influence both the intention and decision to employ child labor. Conversely, knowledge of child labor protection laws exerts a negative effect, indicating that higher legal awareness reduces the likelihood of accepting and employing child labor. Notably, the findings also highlight the moderating role of law enforcement, which weakens the relationship between intention and actual employment of children, underscoring the importance of legal frameworks and monitoring mechanisms in mitigating child labor.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes empirical evidence to behavioral models in the field of child labor and clarifies the mediating mechanism of intention as well as the moderating effect of law enforcement within the specific context

of traditional craft villages. Practically, the findings emphasize the need to enhance legal awareness, strengthen monitoring and enforcement of child labor regulations, and implement appropriate financial support and alternative training policies to reduce pressures on village owners. Moreover, addressing the entrenched labor culture in craft communities - where child participation is normalized - should be a key focus in strategies aimed at reducing child labor in Vietnam. In conclusion, this study not only advances understanding of the factors influencing child labor practices in the informal sector but also provides a scientific basis for policymaking, intervention, and program development aimed at sustainable development, child protection, and the humane preservation of traditional cultural values.

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Data availability

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