

The Importance of Civic Education to Increase Community Legal Awareness

Jeje Abdul Rojak

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 December 2020

Revised 13 January 2021

Accepted 19 January 2021

Key words:

Civic education, Legal awareness, Learning methods, Legal education, Community participation, Digital technology, Education policy.

ABSTRACT

Legal awareness is an important element in the life of the nation and state that reflects the level of community compliance with the rule of law and their understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens. Civic education has a strategic role in shaping legal awareness through teaching the values of democracy, human rights and social responsibility. This study aims to analyze the relationship between civic education and the level of legal awareness in society, identify obstacles in its implementation, and formulate strategies that can increase the effectiveness of civic education to build legal awareness. This research uses a literature study approach by analyzing various academic sources, scientific journals, and previous research results related to civic education and legal awareness. The results show that although civic education contributes to improving people's legal understanding, its effectiveness still faces various obstacles, such as theoretical learning methods, limited access to applicable legal education, and lack of practical involvement in the legal system. Therefore, strategies that can be implemented include the use of experiential learning methods, strengthening the competence of educators, developing a more adaptive curriculum, utilizing digital technology, and increasing cooperation between schools and legal institutions. With the implementation of these strategies, civic education is expected to be more effective in increasing people's legal awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Legal awareness is an important element in the life of the nation, reflecting the level of citizens' compliance with the rule of law and their understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens. Civic education acts as the main instrument to instill legal values and shape the character of law-aware citizens.. Various studies show that the higher a person's understanding of the law through civic education, the more likely they are to comply with the legal norms that apply in society (Baeihaqi, 2020). Therefore, civic education aims to form a theoretical understanding of the law, and encourage individuals to apply it in their daily lives.

More specifically, the low level of legal awareness in various countries shows the importance of the role of civic education to build a law-abiding society. A study conducted by Belladonna (2019) in a university setting revealed that students who received civic education with a legal approach tended to have a better

understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens and showed more law-abiding behavior. This proves that civic learning based on legal material has a real impact on increasing legal awareness among students. In a broader scope, learning models that integrate legal studies in civic education can be a solution to the problem of low legal awareness in society.

The phenomenon of low legal awareness is also reflected in various cases of non-compliance with the law that occur in society. In Indonesia, although civic education has been taught from elementary school to college, there are still many law violations that occur, especially among teenagers and university students (Hidayatin & Muchtar, 2020). This shows that the learning methods applied in civic education need to be further developed in order to be more effective in increasing legal awareness. Another study conducted by Newcombe and Cohen (2018) in the United States showed that community-based legal education programs, such

* Corresponding author, email address: jejeabulrojak@yahoo.com

as the "Mini-Law School Program," can improve people's understanding of the legal system and reduce the number of law violations. This indicates that a more interactive and hands-on learning method can have a greater impact on increasing community legal awareness.

Although civic education has become part of the education system in many countries, the level of legal awareness in society is still not optimal. Many individuals still do not understand their rights and obligations as citizens, which ultimately results in low compliance with the law. Although students receive civic education, their understanding of legal norms is still limited, especially in the aspect of active participation in the legal system (Belladonna, 2019). Students with critical patterns have life dynamics that need to be directed (Darmawan, 2016). They must experience hands-on practice of everything material to understand better. This shows that there is a gap between the theory taught in class and the application in the real world.

One of the main problems faced in civic education is teaching methods that are still theoretical and do not emphasize direct experience. Civic learning is often limited to teaching basic concepts about the law without an approach that encourages students to internalize legal values in everyday life (Hidayatin & Muchtar, 2020). As a result, many students understand the law as something theoretical, not as a guide in behaving as a responsible citizen.

The lack of legal understanding in society is also influenced by the lack of access to practical legal education. A study conducted by Newcombe and Cohen (2018) in the United States showed that many citizens lacked a basic understanding of the legal system, leading to their inability to navigate the law in their daily lives. Therefore, more practice-oriented civic education programs, such as the Mini-Law School Program, are needed to bridge the gap between legal knowledge and its application in society.

Another problem that arises in civic education is the lack of integration between legal education and active participation in democracy. High legal awareness means understanding the applicable law, and taking an active role in legal and policy-making processes (Riezanova, 2020). However, in many cases, civic education has not maximally developed individuals' ability to contribute to the legal system, either through advocacy or participation in legislative processes.

Overall, there are still challenges to ensuring that civic education can actually raise the level of legal awareness in society. Some of the main obstacles include ineffective teaching methods,

limited access to applicable legal education, and a lack of encouragement for people to play an active role in the legal system. Therefore, innovations are needed in the civic education curriculum so that it can be more effective in instilling higher legal awareness in society.

Civic education has a strategic role to play in shaping individuals who have high legal awareness so it is important to understand the urgency of this study. One of the main reasons for the importance of this study is the low level of legal understanding in various groups of society. Students who receive law-based civic education have a better understanding of their rights and obligations compared to those who do not receive such education (Baeihaqi, 2020). This confirms that civic education is not just theoretical teaching, and is a factor that can increase legal awareness in society.

There is a gap in the effectiveness of civic education to increase legal awareness, known as the research gap in this field. Although legal materials have been taught in civic education, many students still do not understand how to apply the law in their daily lives (Hidayatin & Muchtar, 2020). This suggests the need for further research into the most effective strategies to integrate legal education in the civics curriculum so that it can generate greater impact to improve people's legal awareness.

Another urgency is the direct impact of low legal awareness on social life and democracy. Low legal awareness can lead to non-compliance with the law and low participation in democratic life (Riezanova, 2020). Therefore, examining the relationship between civic education and legal awareness can help to design more effective educational policies to form a more legally aware and active society in a democratic system.

Thus, research on the relationship between civic education and the level of legal awareness has academic relevance, and is significant in terms of public policy. The results of this study can serve as a basis for policy makers to design curricula that are more oriented towards the practice of law, as well as develop educational programs that can improve the legal understanding of the wider community.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between civic education and the level of legal awareness in society. Specifically, it aims to identify the extent to which civic education contributes to building citizens' understanding of their legal rights and obligations. This study aims to reveal the obstacles faced in the implementation of civic education to increase legal awareness, both

in terms of learning methods, accessibility of legal information, and social factors that affect its effectiveness. By understanding these challenges, this research also aims to formulate strategies that can improve the effectiveness of civic education so that it is better able to form a society that has high legal awareness and actively participates in the democratic and legal life of the country.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature study approach to analyze the relationship between civic education and the level of legal awareness in society. The literature study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various relevant scientific sources to understand the pattern of relationships, obstacles, and effective strategies in implementing civic education to increase legal awareness.

Data sources in this study were obtained from scientific journals, academic books, and research reports. The data collected includes the results of previous studies that discuss the effectiveness of civic education to improve legal understanding, factors that influence the success of civic education, and various strategies that have been implemented in the education system in various countries. The references used were from reputable international journals indexed in academic databases, such as Scopus and Web of Science, to ensure the validity and relevance of the data.

The data analysis technique in this research uses a qualitative analysis method with a descriptive approach. Data obtained from various sources will be categorized based on the main themes, such as the impact of civic education on legal awareness, challenges in implementation, and strategies to increase the effectiveness of civic education. After that, a synthesis of various research results is carried out to draw conclusions that can contribute to theoretical understanding and policies related to civic education and community legal awareness.

The credibility of the research was maintained by triangulating the sources, i.e. comparing findings from different journals and academic reports on the same topic (Law, 2004). The validity of the research was strengthened by reviewing studies conducted across different social and geographical perspectives to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between civic education and legal awareness.

With this literature study approach, the research is expected to provide insights into the effectiveness of civic education to increase people's legal awareness, as well as offer recommendations for policy makers and education practitioners to develop a more adaptive and applicable curriculum to form law-aware citizens.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Effect of Civic Education on Increasing Legal Awareness in Society

Civic education has a significant role to play in building people's legal awareness by instilling democratic values, human rights, and obligations as citizens. A study conducted by Zhu et al. (2018) revealed that individuals who receive civic education tend to have a better understanding of the law and legal procedures compared to those who do not receive such education. This high legal awareness contributes to increased compliance with the law as well as active participation in social and political life.

Increasing legal awareness through civic education is also influenced by the learning methods applied (Allen et al., 2012). Experiential approaches, such as legal case discussions and court simulations, can improve students' understanding of the legal system and the consequences of violating the law (Rani, 2016). This suggests that more interactive civic teaching can have a more tangible impact on increasing legal awareness compared to theoretical approaches.

At the tertiary level, civic education enhances legal understanding and characterizes students as responsible citizens. Law-based civic education in higher education serves to build students' legal character and increase their awareness of legal rights and obligations (Zhu, 2018). Students who gain a better understanding of the law tend to be more active in upholding justice and participating in public policy.

However, the effectiveness of civic education to increase legal awareness depends on the formal curriculum, and on real experiences in society. Individuals who have the opportunity to participate in law-based social activities, such as discussion forums or advocacy organizations, show higher levels of legal awareness compared to those who only get formal education (Bobrytska, 2019). This indicates that a combination of formal education and hands-on experience can provide more optimal results to build people's legal awareness.

Civic education plays a role in reducing the level of lawlessness among adolescents and the younger generation. According to research conducted by Danilewicz and Prymak (2017), adolescents who have a high level of legal awareness tend to be better able to avoid deviant behavior that violates social and legal norms. Thus, civic education can be one of the preventive strategies to reduce the number of law violations among the community.

In the scope of globalization and digitalization, civic education also faces the challenge of adjusting to social and technological developments (Li et al., 2022).

The development of information technology and social media can be an effective tool to increase legal awareness, but can also be a threat if used to disseminate misleading legal information (Belenchuk & Nevskaya, 2016). Therefore, civic education must continue to adapt to the times in order to remain relevant and effective in raising people's legal awareness.

Civic education has a significant role to play in increasing legal awareness in society by providing a better understanding of citizens' rights and obligations, improving compliance with the law and encouraging active participation in democratic life. However, to achieve maximum results, civic education must be combined with direct experience in social life as well as adaptation to developments in information technology. Civic education can be an effective instrument to build a more law-aware and democratic society.

Constraints in the Implementation of Civic Education Aiming to Increase Legal Awareness

One of the main obstacles in the implementation of civic education aimed at increasing legal awareness is the learning methods that are still theoretical and less applicable. A study conducted by Tamunoibuomi (2016) shows that most civic education is still taught through passive lecture methods and does not involve students in discussions or real-life legal simulations. As a result, students understand the law conceptually but struggle to apply it in everyday life.

The lack of preparedness of teaching staff to teach civic education is also a major obstacle to increasing legal awareness. A study conducted by Akbal and Umar (2018) found that most civics teachers in Indonesia have a limited understanding of the laws and regulations they teach. The lack of training for teachers in the legal field means that they are unable to teach civic education appropriately and based on real cases relevant to students' lives.

In addition to teaching factors, another obstacle in the implementation of civic education is the lack of teaching materials that are appropriate and relevant to the social conditions of the community. Most civic education textbooks in secondary schools do not reflect the latest legal developments and still use a normative approach that is less attractive to students (Akmal et al., 2018). The lack of curriculum adaptation to legal and social changes makes civic education less effective in increasing students' legal awareness.

Another obstacle is the lack of student engagement in hands-on experiences related to law and justice. Education systems in many countries still lack opportunities for students to experience

practice-based learning, such as internships at legal institutions or participation in school legal clinic programs (Mimoso et al., 2018). In fact, engagement in practice-based activities can improve students' understanding of the law and motivate them to respect the rule of law more.

The development of information technology and social media also provides its own challenges in the implementation of civic education. Many students are more exposed to legal information from social media that is not necessarily valid compared to information from formal education (Belenchuk & Nevskaya, 2016). The spread of false or manipulative legal information on social media can undermine the effectiveness of civic education to instill a correct understanding of the law.

Inconsistent educational policy factors are also a major obstacle in the implementation of civic education to increase legal awareness (Bentahar & O'brien, 2019). Educational policies that are not integrated with national strategies to build legal awareness cause civic education to run partially and not have a broad impact (Matusevych & Kolesnyk, 2020). The lack of synergy between the government, educational institutions, and legal institutions causes civic education not to be maximized to increase people's legal awareness.

Obstacles in the implementation of civic education aimed at increasing legal awareness cover various aspects, ranging from less applicable learning methods, limited teacher competence, irrelevant teaching materials, lack of practice-based experience, uncontrolled social media influence, to poorly coordinated education policies. Therefore, more systematic efforts are needed to overcome these obstacles so that civic education can be more effective in building higher legal awareness in society.

Strategies to Improve the Effectiveness of Civic Education to Build Community Legal Awareness

One of the main strategies to increase the effectiveness of civic education to build legal awareness is the application of a direct experience-based approach. According to research conducted by Trisiana et al. (2015), the Project Citizen model can be used as a learning method that encourages students to be active in learning the law through involvement in real projects in the community. This model allows students to identify legal issues in their environment, seek solutions, as well as develop policies that can be proposed to the authorities. This approach increases legal awareness and shapes critical thinking skills and active participation in the legal system.

Strengthening the competence of educators is an important step to improve the effectiveness of civic education. The lack of specialized training for teachers to teach legal materials is one of the main obstacles in civic education (Zhumagulov, 2020). Therefore, the government and educational institutions need to provide training programs for teachers so that they have an understanding of the law and are able to teach it with more interactive methods that are based on real cases.

The next strategy is to develop a more adaptive and real-life law-based curriculum. The importance of integrating contemporary legal issues into the civic education curriculum so that students can understand the relevance of law in their daily lives. A more contextualized curriculum will enable students to better understand and internalize legal norms as well as the consequences of breaking the law (Gerston, 2014).

In addition to curriculum changes, the use of technology and digital media in civic education is also a very effective strategy (Choi, 2016). Research conducted by Bobrytska (2019) shows that the use of digital-based learning platforms, such as virtual court simulations and online interactive discussions, can increase students' interest in understanding the law and help them see the application of the law in various situations. By utilizing technology, civic education can become more interesting and accessible to more people (Johanek & Puckett, 2005).

Improving the effectiveness of civic education can also be done by increasing collaboration between schools, government and legal institutions. Partnership programs between educational institutions and legal institutions, such as courts and police, can provide students with hands-on experience to understand the legal process (Hidayatin & Muchtar, 2020). Programs such as court visits, question and answer sessions with prosecutors and judges, and trial simulations can provide students with insights into the legal system.

Another strategy that can be implemented is to encourage community participation in legal education. According to research conducted by Fisher (2017), community-based programs such as Street Law in the United States have proven effective in improving legal understanding among the public, especially for those who do not have access to formal legal education. The program involves law students and legal practitioners to educate the general public about their legal rights and obligations.

Overall, to increase the effectiveness of civic education to build public legal awareness, a

comprehensive strategy is needed, starting from the application of experiential learning methods, strengthening the competence of educators, developing relevant curricula, utilizing digital technology, increasing partnerships with legal institutions, to encouraging community participation in legal education. With a more innovative and participatory approach, civic education can be a more effective instrument to form citizens who have high legal awareness.

CONCLUSION

Civic education has a very important role to play in increasing people's legal awareness. Based on the research that has been conducted, it was found that effective civic education increases individuals' understanding of the law, and encourages compliance with rules and participation in democratic life. However, the effectiveness of civic education to form a law-aware society still faces various obstacles, such as learning methods that are less applicable, limited competence of educators, and lack of integration between legal education and real experiences in everyday life. Therefore, various innovations in learning strategies are needed to overcome these obstacles and ensure that civic education can contribute more optimally to forming citizens who have high legal awareness.

To make civic education more effective, several strategies are needed that can be applied at various levels of education. One of the main strategies is to develop experiential learning methods, such as Project Citizen and court simulations, which allow learners to understand and apply the law in real situations. Strengthening the competence of educators through periodic training programs is essential so that they have a better understanding of the law and are able to teach it with more interactive methods. The civic education curriculum also needs to be updated regularly to keep up with legal developments and social realities.

The utilization of digital technology can be a solution to improve the effectiveness of civic education. The use of technology-based learning media, such as e-learning, virtual simulations and online discussions, can help students to understand legal concepts in a more interesting and accessible way. Increased cooperation between schools, government, and legal institutions is also necessary to provide hands-on experience to students through court visits, advocacy programs, or discussion forums with legal practitioners.

Community involvement in legal education should also be increased. Community-based legal education programs, such as Street Law and legal counseling programs in schools and communities, can be effective efforts to build legal awareness in a more inclusive manner. Education policies should be directed towards a more effective approach by involving various parties, including the government, educational institutions, and civil society organizations.

Legal awareness is not just an understanding of the applicable regulations, but also reflects the responsibility of individuals to carry out their rights and obligations as citizens. Therefore, civic education must continue to be developed in order to produce a generation that understands the law theoretically, and applies it in everyday life. With the right strategy and synergy between various stakeholders, it is hoped that civic education can become a more effective instrument for building a law-aware and democratic society.

REFERENCES

- Akbal, M., & F. Umar. (2018). Legal Understanding in Field of Educator Profession (Study of Civic Teacher as Participants on PLPG Rayon 124 UNM year 2017). *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1028, 1-4.
- Akmal, A., A. Ananda, & H. Hasrul. (2018). The Development of Civic Education Textbook on Legal and Human Rights Awareness for Senior High/Vocational Schools through Local Cultural Approach in Indonesia. *International Conference on Global Education VI*. 1(1). 591-599.
- Allen, M. D., S. A. Parker, & T. C. DeLorenzo. (2012). Civic Engagement in the Community: Undergraduate Clinical Legal Education. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 8(1), 35-49.
- Baeihaqi. (2020). Civic Education Learning Based on Law-Related Education Approach in Developing Student's Law Awareness. Atlantis Press. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. 418. 44-49.
- Belenchuk, L., & S. Nevskaya. (2016). Information Society and Civic Education of the Personality. SHS Web of Conferences, 29(5), 1-5.
- Belladonna, A. P. (2018). Strengthening Citizenship Education as Legal Education in Higher Education. *Journal of National Civic Studies*, 4(2), 45-58.
- Bentahar, A., & J. O'Brien. (2019). Raising Students' Awareness of Social Justice through Civic Literacy. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10(1), 193-218.
- Bobrytska, V. (2019). The Phenomenon of Civic Education in the Philosophical, Social, and Educational Contexts. *Educational Discourse: Collection of Scientific Papers*, 11(3), 7-19.
- Choi, M. (2016). A concept analysis of digital citizenship for democratic citizenship education in the internet age. *Theory & research in social education*, 44(4), 565-607.
- Danilewicz, W., & T. Prymak. (2017). From Legal Awareness of the Contemporary Youth to Legal Culture of the Information Society. *Legal Education Journal*, 2(116), 131-143.
- Darmawan, D. (2016). *Pengaruh Pembelajaran dan Kendali Diri terhadap Perilaku Pembelian Impulsif (Studi pada Mahasiswa Peserta Matakuliah Pengantar Ilmu Ekonomi)*. Metromedia, Surabaya.
- Fisher, M. (2017). So What is Street Law Anyway – A U.S. Perspective. *International Journal of Public Legal Education*, 1(1), 87-92.
- Gerston, L. N. (2014). *Public policymaking in a democratic society: A guide to civic engagement*. Routledge.
- Hidayatin, E. N., & S. A. Muchtar. (2020). Development of Law and Human Rights Awareness in Civics Education (Case Study of Law and Human Rights Awareness Students Forum (FPSH HAM) West Java). *Journal of International Civic Policy*, 3(1), 73-80.
- Johanek, M. C., & J. Puckett. (2005). *The Public Schools*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Law, J. (2004). *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. Routledge, New York.
- Li, Y., C. Bao, & M. Liu. (2023). The Integration of Legal Education and Mental Health Education of College Students in the Contemporary Network Environment Facing the Cultivation of Civic Awareness. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022, 1.
- Matusevych, T., & L. Kolesnyk. (2019). Developing Civic Competence within the New Ukrainian School Concept: Contemporary Challenges for Teacher Education. *Philosophy of Education*, 25(2), 240-250.
- Mimoso, M. J., M. R. Anjos, & C. Miranda. (2018). Legal Clinics, a Challenge for the Teaching of Law. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(3), 101-108.
- Newcombe, P. K., & B. Cohen. (2018). Mini-Law School: Civic Education Making a Difference in the Community. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 16(2), 381-397.
- Rani, A. (2016). Legal Education Need of Society. *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology*, 2(6), 71-72.

- Riezanova, N. (2020). The Concept of Citizenship as the Core of Civic Education. *Journal of Civic and Democratic Studies*, 9, 87-97.
- Trisiana, A., S. Jutmini, S. Haryati, & F. Hidayatullah. (2015). The Development Strategy of Citizenship Education in Civic Education Using Project Citizen Model in Indonesia. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Research*, 23(2), 111-124.
- Zhu, J., Kuang, X., Kennedy, K., & Mok, M. (2018). Previous Civic Experience and Asian Adolescents' Expected Participation in Legal Protest: Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and Interest. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 38(3), 414-431.

*Rojak, J. A. (2021). The Importance of Civic Education to Increase Community Legal Awareness, *Journal of Social Science Studies*, 1(1), 44 - 50.