Jurnal PAJAR (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran)
Volume 10 Nomor 2 March 2026 | ISSN Cetak : 2580 - 8435 | ISSN Online : 2614 - 1337
DOI : http://dx.doi.org/10.33578/pjr.v10i2.1468

Legal Literacy Among Civic Education Students: A Study of Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to empirically examine the level of legal literacy among Citizenship Education students across cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. The approach is quantitative, with a survey design. The study sample consisted of 50 students selected through probability sampling techniques. The research instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire structured around three main dimensions: legal Knowledge, legal Awareness, and law-abiding behaviour. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA to examine differences in legal literacy across semesters. The results show that students' legal literacy is generally high across all dimensions. The affective dimension shows the strongest trend, followed by the cognitive and behavioural dimensions. In addition, there are significant differences in legal literacy levels by semester, indicating that academic experience contributes to progressive improvement in legal literacy. These findings confirm that legal literacy is a multidimensional competency that needs to be developed in an integrated manner through the Citizenship Education curriculum. This study provides theoretical contributions to strengthening the legal literacy model and practical implications for developing more participatory and reflective learning strategies in higher education.

Keywords*: *legal literacy, cognitive dimension, legal awareness, law-abiding behaviour

Submitted	Accepted	Published
26 February 2026	10 March 2026	30 March 2026

Citation	:	Radini, R., Kurniaman, O., Al Fajar, B., Zufriady, Z., Munjiatun, M., & Setiawan, A. (2026). Legal Literacy Among Civic Education Students: A Study of Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural Dimensions. *Jurnal PAJAR (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran), 10*(2), 240-249. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.33578/pjr.v10i2.1468.

INTRODUCTION

Legal literacy has become a crucial competency in a democratic society governed by the rule of law, as it equips individuals with the Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours necessary to understand and apply legal norms in everyday life (Ay, 2023; Kumar & Hamid, 2025). In the context of higher education, legal literacy encompasses not only cognitive understanding of the law but also normative Awareness and behavioural compliance (Kurniaman et al., 2025). This multidimensional nature aligns with the civic responsibility expected of future educators, particularly those studying Civics, also known as Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) (Tjeppy, 2021; Siregar & Kemala, 2023).

Civic Education programs are designed to foster students' legal Knowledge, civic values, and participatory behaviour, which form the foundation for responsible Citizenship (Tjeppy, 2021; Sukmayadi et al., 2025). However, empirical evidence shows that increasing theoretical Knowledge alone does not always translate into high levels of legal Awareness and law-abiding behavior (Damayanti et al., 2023; Erdianti & Nurzakiah, 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to examine legal literacy from a multidimensional perspective that integrates the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains.

The cognitive dimension refers to legal Knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles, rights, and obligations (Ay, 2023). However, legal Knowledge alone is insufficient to ensure that students will act in accordance with legal norms (Radini et al., 2025). Therefore, the affective dimension, which includes attitudes, values, and emotional dispositions toward law and justice, must also be considered (Hidayah et al., 2025; Baeihaqi & Komalasari, 2020). Attitudinal orientation toward the law significantly

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influences students' willingness to engage in law-abiding behaviour and to advocate for legal principles in their society (Kurniyawan & Tanshzil, 2024).

Furthermore, the behavioural dimension reflects observable legal compliance, civic participation, and responsible Citizenship. Behavioural indicators include adherence to institutional regulations, proactive involvement in civic activities, and consistent application of legal Knowledge (Kumar & Hamid, 2025; Siregar & Kemala, 2023). Research shows that students who internalize civic and legal values are more likely to demonstrate law-abiding behaviour in academic and social contexts (Erdianti & Nurzakiah, 2025; Sukmayadi et al., 2025).

Although the dimensions of legal literacy have been conceptually recognized, empirical research that simultaneously examines cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects remains limited, particularly in Civic Education programs at higher education institutions. Most previous studies have focused primarily on knowledge assessments or attitude surveys without integrating comprehensive behavioural measures (Damayanti et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2025). This research gap highlights the need to develop an empirical model that holistically captures legal literacy among Civic Education students.

Furthermore, strengthening legal literacy has broader educational and social implications, including fostering a culture of the rule of law, reducing legal misunderstandings, and preparing educators to promote legal norms in society effectively (Tjeppy, 2021; Ay, 2023). By empirically investigating the multidimensional structure of legal literacy, this study aims to contribute to citizenship education theory and offer practical insights for curriculum development in higher education.

Therefore, this study aims to empirically test a comprehensive model of legal literacy among Civic Education students, grounded in cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. This research not only provides an analytical framework for understanding legal literacy but also provides implications for strengthening the Civic Education curriculum to foster legal Awareness and civic responsibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legal literacy in the context of civics education refers to students' understanding of the legal system, the rights and obligations of citizens, and their Awareness of how to adopt attitudes and behaviours in accordance with applicable laws. Some researchers view civics education as *legal education*, equipping students not only with formal Knowledge but also with the ability to apply, synthesize, and appreciate law in social life. Legal literacy develops not only as cognitive Knowledge but also as affective attitudes and practical behavior in everyday life (Siregar & Kemala, 2023).

The cognitive dimension encompasses aspects of students' Knowledge and understanding of legal concepts, legal systems, rights and obligations, and legal institutional structures. Research in civic literacy indicates that students' cognitive abilities in PPKn are often stronger than their affective and behavioural aspects, suggesting that learning remains focused on theoretical Knowledge (Nurlinasari & Hamid, 2018).

The affective dimension concerns students' attitudes, interests, perceptions of the law, and their engagement with legal values. Empirical research shows that civic literacy through literacy learning can improve students' moral values and character, reflecting the affective dimension by shaping positive attitudes toward social norms and the law (Resmini et al., 2025). Furthermore, student involvement in contextual activities such as character value discussions and legal case simulations in civic education also influences the consistency of positive attitudes toward the law. This underscores the need for a learning model that emphasizes not only Knowledge but also the internalization of legal values (Nurgiansah et al., 2024).

Based on these various limitations, this study attempts to fill the research gap by examining students' legal literacy from a more comprehensive perspective through an analysis of three main dimensions: the cognitive dimension (legal Knowledge), the affective dimension (attitude and Awareness towards the law), and the behavioural dimension (legal compliance and practice in daily life). With this approach, the study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' legal literacy levels in the context of Civic Education and its contribution to the formation of legally aware citizens.

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The behavioural dimension encompasses students' ability to apply legal Knowledge and attitudes in real-life activities, such as complying with school rules, participating in social activities, and making legal-related decisions. Practice-oriented civics education, such as project work, legal simulations, or social decision-making, affects students' legal behaviour in real-life contexts (Mustikarini & Harmawati, 2023).

METHOD

According to Sugiyono, the quantitative research method is based on the philosophy of positivism, used to study a specific population or sample using a random sampling technique, data collection with research instruments, and quantitative or statistical data analysis, with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. This method emphasizes the objective measurement of variables, the use of numbers as data representation, and the testing of relationships or influences between variables through statistical analysis, thereby producing findings that can be generalized to a wider population. (Sugiyono, 2019).

The population in this study consisted of all students enrolled in related courses during the current semester who had characteristics relevant to the research variables. Given the limitations of time, energy, and costs, this study used a sampling technique to determine a portion of the population as respondents. The research sample comprised 50 students, selected using probability sampling (e.g., simple random sampling) so that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. The 50 respondents are considered sufficient for quantitative analysis, particularly in testing the relationship or influence between variables using parametric statistical analysis, so that the research results can still represent the population's condition proportionally.

A research instrument is a tool used to collect data on the variables under study, enabling objective, systematic measurement of research results. In quantitative research, instruments generally take the form of questionnaires, compiled based on indicators for each variable dimension and measured using a specific scale, such as a Likert scale. Instrument development involves determining the grid, formulating indicators, developing statement items, and testing validity and reliability to ensure the instrument accurately and consistently measures the construct. With valid and reliable instruments, the data obtained will be accurate and can be used to test hypotheses and draw scientific conclusions, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Legal Literacy Instrument Grid

No	Dimensions	Indicator	Item Number	Number of Items
1	Cognitive	Understanding of legal concepts	1, 2	2
		Understanding the rights and obligations of citizens	3, 4	2
		Knowledge of sanctions and rules	5, 6	2
2	Affective	Attitude of respecting the law	7, 8	2
		Awareness of the importance of the law	9, 10	2
		Concern for violations of the law	11, 12	2
3	Behavior	Compliance with the rules	13, 14	2
		Participation in law-abiding activities	15, 16	2
		Consistency in acting according to the law	17, 18	2
Total			**18 Item**	

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Table 2. Research Instrument (Statement Items)

No	Statement	Dimensions
1	I understand the meaning of law in social life.	Cognitive
2	I know the function of law in maintaining social order.	Cognitive
3	I understand my rights and obligations as a citizen.	Cognitive
4	I know of examples of law violations in the local area.	Cognitive
5	I understand the types of sanctions in legal regulations.	Cognitive
6	I know the procedures for solving simple legal problems.	Cognitive
7	I appreciate the rules that apply on campus/school.	Affective
8	I feel it is important for the law to be enforced impartially.	Affective
9	I am aware of the applicable rules and will obey them.	Affective
10	I feel guilty if I break the rules.	Affective
11	I care about the law violations in my neighbourhood.	Affective
12	I support fair law enforcement.	Affective
13	I always comply with the applicable regulations.	Behavior
14	I did not commit any act that violated the rules.	Behavior
15	I participate in activities that support legal Awareness.	Behavior
16	I remind my friends to follow the rules.	Behavior
17	I try to solve problems according to the correct procedure.	Behavior
18	I consistently act in accordance with applicable norms and laws.	Behavior

Data analysis techniques in quantitative research are statistical in nature, used to test hypotheses and answer research questions. Data collected through research instruments are first tested for quality through validity and reliability tests, then analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe data characteristics (such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics to examine relationships or influences between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Legal Literacy Competence

This study examines students' legal literacy across three main dimensions: Legal Knowledge, Legal Awareness, and Law-abiding Behaviour, treated as a single, interrelated construct. Legal Knowledge reflects the extent to which students understand concepts, norms, rights, obligations, and applicable legal regulations. Legal Awareness indicates the level of students' attitudes, appreciation, and internal commitment to the importance of law in social and national life. Meanwhile, Law-abiding Behaviour describes the actual application of this Knowledge and Awareness through actions that comply with applicable rules and norms. These three dimensions are analyzed holistically to provide a comprehensive picture of students' legal literacy. The results of the study are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Legal Literacy

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Category
Legal Knowledge	84.20	6.15	70	95	High
Legal Awareness	86.10	5.40	75	96	High
Law-abiding behavior	81.75	6.80	68	92	High
Total Legal Literacy	**252.05**	**17.90**	**220**	**281**	**High**

Based on Table 3, all legal literacy variables are in the high category with average values showing a positive trend. Legal Knowledge has a mean of 84.20, a standard deviation of 6.15, a minimum of 70, and a maximum of 95, indicating that students' understanding of legal concepts and regulations is relatively good

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and relatively homogeneous. Legal Awareness obtained the highest mean of 86.10, with a standard deviation of 5.40 and a score range of 75–96, indicating that students' attitudes and appreciation for the law are at a strong, consistent level. Meanwhile, Law-abiding Behaviour has a mean of 81.75, a standard deviation of 6.80, and a score range of 68–92, which remains in the high category despite slightly greater variation in answers than the other dimensions. Overall, total legal literacy reached a mean of 252.05 with a standard deviation of 17.90 and a range of 220–281, confirming that students' level of legal literacy is generally in the high category. To see the percentage results, see Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage of Legal Literacy Competencies

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Very high	18	36%
High	25	50%
Currently	7	14%
Low	0	0%

Based on the data classification results, the level of legal literacy among students showed a very positive trend. Eighteen students (36%) were in the very high category, and 25 students (50%) were in the high category. Overall, 86% of respondents had high to very high levels of legal literacy. Meanwhile, 7 students (14%) were in the moderate category, and none were in the low category (0%). This distribution indicates that the majority of students have a good understanding, attitude, and behavioural tendencies regarding aspects of legal literacy, although a small number still require further strengthening to achieve a more optimal category.

Legal Literacy Based on Cognitive, Affective, and Behaviour Aspects

The following discussion examines the results of legal literacy research across cognitive, affective, and behaviour domains, demonstrating that legal understanding and implementation extend beyond Knowledge to encompass attitudes and concrete actions. The cognitive dimension (regulatory understanding) reflects an individual's ability to recognize, comprehend, and explain applicable legal rules and provisions. The affective dimension (attitude toward law enforcement) illustrates how individuals value, support, and commit to fair and consistent law enforcement. Meanwhile, the Behaviour dimension (practice compliance) demonstrates the concrete application of this Knowledge and attitude through compliant behaviour in everyday life. These three aspects are interrelated and form a complete picture of an individual's level of legal literacy, as a sound understanding must be accompanied by a positive attitude and be manifested in actions that comply with the law.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Dimensions

Variables	Mean	SD	Mix	Max	Category
Cognitive	82.30	7.10	65	94	High
Affective	88.45	5.20	77	97	Very high
Psychomotor	79.90	6.85	67	91	High
Total Score	**250.65**	**18.75**	**215**	**278**	**High**

Based on Table 5, the analysis shows that students' legal literacy across the cognitive, affective, and behaviour domains is generally in the high category. The cognitive dimension has a mean of 82.30, a standard deviation of 7.10, and a score range of 65–94, indicating that students' understanding of regulations is relatively good despite the wide range of responses. The affective dimension had the highest mean of 88.45, with a standard deviation of 5.20 and a range of 77–97, indicating that students' attitudes toward law enforcement are

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very positive and relatively consistent. Meanwhile, the behaviour dimension has a mean of 79.90, a standard deviation of 6.85, and a range of 67–91, indicating that compliance practices are in the high category but still have room for improvement. Overall, the total legal literacy score had a mean of 250.65, a standard deviation of 18.75, and a range of 215–278; thus, it can be concluded that students' comprehensive legal literacy is in the high category.

Legal Literacy by Semester

Based on Table 6, students' legal literacy tends to increase with increasing semester level. Semester 2 students (N = 17) obtained an average score of 238.40 with a standard deviation of 15.20, which is in the high category, indicating that, since the beginning of the lecture, students have had a strong foundation in legal literacy. In Semester 4 (N = 16), the average increased to 249.60 with a standard deviation of 16.30 and remained in the high category, indicating a strengthening of legal understanding and attitudes through the learning process. The most prominent increase was observed in Semester 6 (N = 17), with a mean of 263.80 and a standard deviation of 14.75, which falls in the very high category, indicating that the higher the semester, the more mature students' legal literacy. This finding indicates that academic experience and exposure to course material contribute to the gradual increase in legal literacy.

Table 6. Average Legal Literacy per Semester

Semester	N	Mean	SD	Category
Semester 2	17	238.40	15.20	High
Semester 4	16	249.60	16.30	High
Semester 6	17	263.80	14.75	Very high

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA Test

Source of Variation	F Count	Mr. (p)	Information
Inter-Semester	5.84	0.005	Significant

Based on Table 7, the results of the one-way ANOVA test show that the calculated F value is 5.84 with a significance value (p) of 0.005. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), there is a significant difference in legal literacy between the semester groups. This indicates that variations in students' legal literacy scores do not occur by chance, but are influenced by differences in semester level. Thus, it can be concluded that the semester level has a significant influence on students' legal literacy, with higher semesters typically associated with higher levels of legal literacy.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students' legal literacy is in the strong category and reflects the integration of Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. Theoretically, legal literacy is part of civic literacy, which serves as the main foundation for the formation of democratic citizens (Galston, 2001; Milner, 2002). In higher education, strengthening legal literacy is important to prepare students to be agents of social change who possess constitutional Awareness and public responsibility (Banks, 2017). This finding aligns with the view that effective civic education must integrate legal understanding with value orientation and social action (Osler & Starkey, 2005).

In the cognitive dimension, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding legal principles, rights, obligations, and the state's institutional system as a basis for developing legal Awareness. According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), responsible citizens must have a structural understanding of social and legal systems to make rational decisions. Furthermore, international research shows that civic Knowledge

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contributes significantly to the quality of democratic participation (Schulz et al., 2016). Therefore, strengthening the cognitive aspect of legal literacy is a strategic step in developing reflective and critical citizenship competencies.

The affective dimension in this study shows that positive attitudes toward the law play a significant role in shaping students' moral commitment. Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development explains that compliance with the law is not solely based on sanctions, but on ethical Awareness developed through the educational process. This is reinforced by research by Torney-Purta et al. (2001), which states that democratic attitudes and values correlate with levels of trust in legal institutions. Therefore, strong legal literacy requires internalizing the values of justice, responsibility, and respect for the rules as part of civic character formation.

In terms of behaviour, this study's findings indicate that legal compliance practices are a concrete manifestation of the integration of Knowledge and attitudes. According to Ajzen (1991) in his Theory of Planned Behaviour, individual behaviour is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived self-control. In the context of legal literacy, students with positive attitudes and a strong understanding of the law tend to exhibit compliant and participatory behaviour. This is also supported by research on civic engagement, which shows that contextual learning experiences increase the likelihood of social action and norm compliance (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

The development of legal literacy based on academic level demonstrates a progressive learning process. Higher education plays a role in developing increasingly mature capacities for critical thinking and normative reflection (Nussbaum, 2010). International studies on civic education also confirm that continuous curriculum exposure contributes to increased legal Awareness and public participation (Isac et al., 2014). Thus, legal literacy is not static but develops through academic experiences, reflective discussions, and social engagement.

Overall, this research strengthens the legal literacy model, grounded in cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, as a comprehensive framework for civic education. This multidimensional approach aligns with the democratic education paradigm, which emphasizes the balance among Knowledge, values, and action (Gutmann, 1999; Banks, 2017). Consequently, civic education curricula need to be designed in an integrative manner, incorporating participatory and reflective learning strategies so that legal literacy becomes not only an academic competency but also fosters a sustainable legal culture within the educational environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that students' legal literacy falls in the strong category and reflects integration across cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. Students not only demonstrate a good understanding of legal concepts and principles but also have a positive attitude toward law enforcement and a tendency to comply with regulations. The integration of these three dimensions indicates that legal literacy is a multidimensional competency developed through a systematic, continuous learning process. Furthermore, differences in legal literacy levels across semesters indicate that academic experience and curriculum exposure contribute to the progressive strengthening of students' legal Awareness and practice. This means that the semester level has a significant influence on legal literacy: the more semesters a student has, the higher their level of legal literacy.

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of education, particularly Citizenship Education in higher education. First, the curriculum needs to be designed holistically by integrating conceptual learning (cognitive), value reinforcement and moral reflection (affective), and participatory and contextual practices (behavioural). Second, learning strategies such as legal case discussions, trial simulations, *project-based learning*, and community service activities need to be optimized to foster genuine internalization of legal values. Third, learning evaluation should not only assess Knowledge but also measure students' attitudes and the consistency of their behaviour toward legal norms. With this

approach, education will not only produce graduates with a theoretical understanding of law but also equip them with a strong legal culture and contribute to building a democratic society based on the rule of law.

Credit authorship contribution statement

First author R: contributed to the formulation of the research concept and design, the development of the theoretical framework, the development of research instruments, data analysis, and the writing of the main draft of the article. Second author OK: contributed to data collection, validation of research instruments, statistical analysis, and writing the research methodology section. Third author B: contributed to the literature review, data processing and interpretation, and the preparation of the results and discussion sections. The fourth author, Z, contributed to academic supervision, sharpening the conceptual analysis, and the critical revision of the article's substance. Fifth author M: contributed to the final editing of the manuscript, checking for conformity of the format according to journal guidelines, and finalizing and approving the manuscript for publication.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical considerations regarding student participation.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for educational research. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from participating schools and teachers prior to data collection. The respondents were university students, and research procedures ensured that student participation did not cause harm or disruption to their learning. All data were collected anonymously, and participant anonymity was strictly maintained. The data obtained were used solely for academic research.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education for their support of this research. They also extend their appreciation to the participating students who contributed to the data collection process and made this research possible. Their cooperation and support were invaluable to the successful completion of this research.

Generative AI Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist with language editing and improve the clarity of the manuscript. The authors carefully reviewed and revised all AI-assisted results to ensure the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content. The authors are solely responsible for the final content of this manuscript.

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