

A Theoretical Review of Urban Community Legal Literacy in the Context of Citizenship Rights and Obligations

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ABSTRACT

Legal literacy is a crucial foundation for building citizens' awareness of their constitutional rights and obligations. This article reviews the current literature on the level of legal literacy in urban communities in understanding their rights and obligations as citizens. Using a qualitative approach based on literature studies, this article examines theories of legal literacy, active citizenship, and urban community dynamics. The findings indicate that the level of legal literacy in urban communities remains uneven, influenced by factors such as education, access to information, and socio-political participation. Recommendations are proposed for the government and educational institutions to more actively implement contextual and locally-based legal education.

Keywords: *legal literacy, urban society, rights and obligations, citizenship, literary studies*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society's legal awareness is a crucial pillar in supporting democracy and the rule of law. Amidst the complex and heterogeneous dynamics of urban society, citizens' ability to understand the law not

only reflects the quality of legal education itself but also influences citizen participation in national and state life (Gunawan & Satria, 2021). One aspect of this study is the level of legal literacy among urban communities in understanding their rights and obligations as citizens.

Legal literacy refers not only to the ability to read legal texts but also to the critical capacity to understand, evaluate, and apply legal norms in everyday life (Widodo, 2022). Legal literacy is a crucial component of civic education, aiming to develop active and responsible citizens. Legal literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand, access, and apply legal information in everyday life.

Legal Literacy: According to Rizky & Purnamasari (2021), legal literacy extends beyond simply understanding the content of the law, encompassing legal awareness, the ability to assess the fairness of a rule, and the ability to use the law as a means of protecting rights. In the context of modern society, legal literacy is closely linked to citizens' active participation in the legal system, including identifying rights violations and consciously fulfilling their obligations. This aligns with the view of Aditya & Wibowo (2022), who emphasize that legal literacy is the foundation for

creating a healthy legal culture in a democratic society.

The primary objective of this article is to conduct a theoretical review of the concept of legal literacy in urban communities, its relationship to understanding the rights and obligations of citizens, and how a legal literacy approach can serve as an educational strategy at the sub-district level. Urban communities have complex and heterogeneous characteristics, with relatively high levels of mobility, education, and access to information compared to rural communities. This directly influences how people understand and respond to legal norms. Urban communities (Putri & Santosa, 2023) suggest that they tend to be more critical and responsive to legal issues due to broader exposure to the media and non-formal legal education. However, high life pressures, economic competition, and urbanization also create opportunities for the emergence of disregard for legal norms if not accompanied by strengthening the values of citizenship and collective responsibility. Therefore, strengthening legal literacy in urban areas must take into account the dynamic local socio-cultural and economic context.

Within a democratic state, citizens have two main pillars: constitutional rights and civic obligations. Citizenship, as stated by (Sari & Hidayat, 2021), is not merely an administrative status but an active identity that demands citizen involvement in legal and social practices. Legal literacy is a crucial bridge for citizens to not only understand their basic rights, such as the right to legal protection, education, and employment, but also to understand their obligations, such as obeying the law, paying taxes, and participating in maintaining public order. This balance between rights and obligations is the foundation for a sustainable and just nation.

Legal literacy is closely related to civic education, which emphasizes the values of democracy, social justice, and the rule of law. According to (Hasanah & Yusuf, 2020), civic education empowers citizens to

become critical, participatory, and responsible citizens. Integrating legal education into the civics curriculum can foster legal awareness from an early age, thus creating an urban generation that not only understands its constitutional rights but is also proactive in carrying out its socio-legal obligations. Legal literacy here functions as a pedagogical instrument as well as a means of social transformation towards a civil society.

Improving legal literacy in urban communities requires a multi-sectoral and collaborative approach. According to Pratama & Kurniawati (2024), an effective strategy involves synergy between local governments, educational institutions, NGOs, and the mass media in disseminating legal information that is easily accessible and understandable to the general public. Digitizing legal information and organizing public discussion forums in urban environments can be a strategic platform for building collective awareness of the importance of law as a mechanism for social protection and control. With this approach, it is hoped that urban communities will internalize legal values in their daily lives and incorporate them into their civic ethics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Legal Literacy in Modern Society

Legal literacy is essentially the ability of the public to understand, access, and utilize legal information actively and responsibly in everyday life. In the context of a democratic society, legal literacy extends beyond mastering legal terminology, encompassing dimensions of awareness, critical judgment, and the ability to use the law as a tool for self-protection and strengthening civil rights. According to Rizky & Purnamasari (2021), legal literacy plays a strategic role in shaping citizen behavior, not only by obeying the rules but also by participating in legal processes, such as reporting violations, utilizing public complaint mechanisms, and resolving disputes legally. This ability is becoming

increasingly important amidst the proliferation of legal information disseminated in various media, where citizens need to distinguish between valid and misleading information.

Legal literacy can also be understood as part of civic literacy, where citizens must be able to play an active role in legal and political life. This aligns with the notion that law is not the sole domain of experts or law enforcement, but rather a collective instrument that ensures social justice. Therefore, increasing legal literacy in society is a crucial step in supporting the creation of a vibrant and contextual legal culture.

Legal literacy is defined as an individual's ability to access, understand, and use legal information in making personal and collective decisions (Pardieck, 2019). Legal literacy goes beyond normative knowledge; it encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of behaving in accordance with the law.

Legal literacy is a crucial skill for communities, especially in urban areas, to understand basic rights and wisely carry out their obligations as citizens. In an increasingly complex and fast-paced world, such as in large cities, citizens are required not only to understand the law but also to interpret, critique, and apply it appropriately in their daily lives. Legal literacy is not sufficient if it simply recognizes regulations; it must develop into an awareness that encourages citizens to actively maintain order, fight for rights, and respect the common good.

On the other hand, the challenges of a heterogeneous, individualistic, and dynamic urban society demand a more contextual approach to building legal awareness. In this context, civic education plays a crucial role as a vehicle to strengthen the public's understanding of their position as legal subjects and agents of social change. When legal literacy is internalized through education and easily accessible information, the public not only becomes law-abiding but also empowered to fight for justice.

Therefore, enhancing legal understanding through an educational, collaborative, and adaptive approach is a strategic step to enable city residents to exercise their rights and obligations in a balanced manner, thereby creating a just and civilized social life.

According to Laili & Arifin (2020), legal literacy involves three main elements: legal knowledge, legal awareness, and legal behavior.

Citizenship and Rights and Obligations

The concept of citizenship was theoretically developed by Marshall (1950), who divided it into civil rights, political rights, and social rights. In the Indonesian context, citizenship refers to an understanding of constitutional rights (e.g., education, employment, justice) as well as legal obligations such as paying taxes, obeying regulations, and actively participating. According to Putra (2022), high legal literacy is directly proportional to citizens' compliance with legal norms and increases participation in political and social life.

Characteristics of Urban Communities and Their Implications for Legal Awareness

Urban communities have different social characteristics than rural communities. Urbanization, high mobility, diverse backgrounds, and significant life pressures create complex social dynamics. On the one hand, urban communities have broader access to information and generally higher levels of education, potentially strengthening legal literacy. On the other hand, fast-paced and competitive lifestyles often lead city dwellers to pay less attention to normative and ethical aspects of social interactions. According to Putri & Santosa (2023), most legal violations in urban areas occur not due to ignorance of the rules, but due to a weak appreciation of legal values themselves.

The individualistic, pragmatic, and materialistic nature that thrives in urban environments also has the potential to

weaken collective awareness of the importance of the rule of law. Therefore, approaches to building legal awareness in urban communities cannot be equated with those used in rural areas. Contextual and participatory methods are needed that can reach diverse communities and make the law part of everyday life solutions, rather than a threat or burden.

Urban communities are characterized by heterogeneity, high mobility, and diverse social structures that can impact access to legal information. According to Nasution (2021), rapid urbanization also poses challenges to the dissemination of legal information, particularly in communities with low levels of education and limited digitalization.

The State of Legal Literacy in Urban Areas: Findings of Previous Studies

According to a study by (Harahap & Amelia, 2023), the level of legal literacy among urban Indonesians remains relatively low. Only 36% of respondents have a thorough understanding of their rights as citizens. Inhibiting factors include:

- The complexity of legal language,
- Lack of practical legal education,
- Low interest in legal literacy among the general public.

Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) also indicates that only around 41% of urban residents access legal information from official sources, such as government websites or local legislation.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. Data sources come from national and international journal articles, academic reference books, and legal and citizenship policy documents published between 2018 and 2024. Content analysis was conducted using theories and previous research findings relevant to the study's focus.

The criteria for selecting literature sources include:

- Relevance to the topic of legal literacy and citizenship;
- Published within the last 7 years at least;
- Priority is given to nationally accredited publications (SINTA) or reputable international journals.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Legal Literacy in Increasing Citizen Awareness

Good legal literacy enables citizens to understand applicable legal procedures and avoid unknowing violations. According to Yulianti (2020), community-based legal education can encourage citizens to become law-conscious citizen law enforcers who also enforce the law socially.

Rights and Obligations as the Core of Citizenship

From a modern legal perspective, every citizen has inherent rights and obligations from birth. These rights include the right to education, health, legal protection, security, and participation in government. However, these rights can only be effectively enforced if citizens are also willing to fulfill their obligations, such as obeying the law, respecting the rights of others, paying taxes, and contributing to maintaining public order. Awareness of citizens' rights and obligations (Sari & Hidayat, 2021) states that awareness is an essential foundation for healthy and civilized citizenship practices.

The concept of citizenship rights and obligations is a fundamental aspect in the study of civic education and political philosophy. According to Kymlicka (2015), citizenship rights reflect the state's guarantee of individual freedom and participation in national life, including civil, political, and social rights. Citizenship is not merely a legal status but also reflects an individual's active participation in the political community. Meanwhile, Marshall (1950) divided citizenship rights into three main dimensions: civil rights (individual freedom), political rights (participation in government), and social rights (access to welfare and education). This division marks

the historical development of the fulfillment of citizens' rights in democratic countries.

Furthermore, Habermas (1998) proposed that deliberative citizenship requires active citizen involvement in public discourse and political decision-making. In this model, rights and obligations are not passive, but rather active and participatory. Every citizen is required to participate in the democratic process through rational dialogue. This perspective broadens the understanding of rights and obligations as two mutually reinforcing aspects of a democratic order.

The rights and obligations of citizens are inseparable in national and state life. Several experts have stated that citizen rights include guarantees of individual freedom, access to social services, and involvement in the political process, while obligations encompass an active role in maintaining order, obeying the law, and participating in nation-building. Kymlicka views citizenship not merely as an administrative status but also as active participation in communal life. Marshall divided citizen rights into three domains: civil, political, and social rights, indicating that citizens not only receive legal protection but also have the right to express their opinions, elect leaders, and access to education and welfare.

In the Indonesian context, Kaelan emphasized that the values of Pancasila guide us not only to demand rights but also to understand our responsibilities to the state and society. This is reinforced by Habermas, who emphasized the importance of citizen involvement in public discussion and decision-making, meaning that being a citizen also means contributing to maintaining the quality of democracy. Even from a legal perspective, as explained by Jimly Asshiddiqie, basic citizen rights are guaranteed in the constitution, but are accompanied by an obligation to respect the rules and rights of others. This means that in national life, citizens cannot simply demand rights without fulfilling their responsibilities. Awareness of this balance is crucial for creating a just, orderly, and

harmonious society. Civic education plays a strategic role in shaping this understanding so that each individual can grow as a citizen who is aware of their rights but also does not neglect their obligations.

The balance between rights and obligations is key to building a just and sustainable social order. When legal literacy is low, people tend to demand rights without understanding their limitations and responsibilities. This can trigger horizontal and vertical conflicts that disrupt social stability. Therefore, strengthening legal literacy in the context of rights and obligations is not solely the responsibility of educational institutions but must be part of public policy design and civil society movements.

A concrete example is the "Kampung Sadar Hukum" program developed by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. This program emphasizes participatory legal education at the neighborhood (RW)/sub-district (kelurahan) level and has successfully increased reporting of legal violations in several major cities.

Strategies for Strengthening Legal Literacy in Urban Communities

Recent literature recommends several strategies to improve legal literacy in urban communities:

1. Integrating legal education into the school curriculum and community PKK (Simamora, 2023).
2. Increasing the role of local legal counselors and paralegals (Kemenkumham, 2022).
3. Utilizing social media and digital technology as a means of locally-based legal education (Fadillah & Arsyad, 2023).

One interesting innovation is the development of the "SiCerdas Hukum" application in Semarang City, which provides access to simple legal information and a free legal Q&A feature for residents.

Civics Education as an Instrument of Legal Literacy

Civics education plays a strategic role in developing legally aware citizens. Through a learning approach that emphasizes the values of democracy, justice, and social responsibility, this education can be an effective medium for developing legal understanding from an early age. Hasanah and Yusuf (2020) suggest that legal literacy will be more easily ingrained when directly linked to citizens' real-life contexts, for example, through case studies of human rights violations, corruption, or agrarian conflicts that are close to their lives.

In urban environments, civics education must be developed in more flexible and contextual forms, for example through community training programs, public discussions, and social media-based educational content. This is because city dwellers tend to prefer practical, fast-paced, and interactive approaches. Integrating legal values into an adaptive education system will produce citizens who not only understand the rules but also care about the fair application of the law in society.

Strategies for Improving Legal Literacy in Urban Areas

Building legal awareness among urban communities requires a collaborative, inclusive, and technology-based strategy. Pratama and Kurniawati (2024) emphasize the importance of utilizing digital media as a means of disseminating engaging and easy-to-understand legal information. Smartphone-based legal applications, short educational videos, and online discussion forums can be effective ways to reach city residents from all social strata. Furthermore, the role of local governments and civil society organizations is crucial in creating spaces for legal participation, such as legal counseling in sub-districts, free legal clinics, or community-based legal awareness campaigns.

A participatory and sustainable approach is crucial to ensure that legal literacy is not merely a short-term project but an integral

part of urban society's social culture. This way, city residents can transform from mere objects of the law into active subjects aware of their rights and responsibilities, and contribute to building a just society.

CONCLUSION

Legal literacy is a strategic instrument for improving the quality of citizenship in urban communities. A literature review shows that public understanding of rights and obligations remains limited, primarily due to legal language barriers, lack of outreach, and limited access to inclusive legal information.

Recommendations

1. The government needs to expand community-based legal education with a participatory approach.
2. Educational institutions and community organizations must become partners in building a culture of legal awareness.
3. Regulations or policies are needed to support the systemic improvement of legal literacy, including the development of legal content in digital media.

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