

Legal Literacy through Understanding Criminal Procedure Law: The Perspective of the Community and Students of Pancasila and Citizenship Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of understanding criminal procedural law in developing legal literacy among Civics (PPKn) students. A qualitative research approach based on descriptive analysis was employed in this study. The researcher employed purposive sampling techniques to interview two law professors and 15 Civics (PPKn) students as research informants. The interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña was used to assess data obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. As demonstrated by the research findings, understanding criminal procedural law contributes to increased legal knowledge, understanding of legal procedures, the ability to analyze legal cases, and students' legal awareness. This understanding also supports the strengthening of civic competencies that include civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic responsibility. However, the development of legal literacy still faces challenges such as the complexity of legal terms, limited practical experience, and the dominance of unverified legal information from digital media. This study confirms that understanding criminal procedural law is a strategic tool in developing legal literacy among Civics (PPKn) students as prospective educators and agents of legal education in the community.

Keywords: Criminal procedure law; Legal literacy; Civics students; Civics competency; Civics education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of modern society demands that every citizen have the ability to understand the law as part of their civic competence. Legal literacy relates not only to knowledge of regulations but also to the ability to understand applicable legal procedures when facing legal issues in everyday life. A good level of legal literacy contributes to the formation of a society that is legally aware, critical, and able to protect its rights constitutionally (Tyler, 2021). On the other hand, low legal understanding can make people vulnerable to rights violations, procedural errors, and even criminalization due to ignorance of the applicable legal mechanisms (Kania & Bielefeldt, 2021).

Criminal Procedure Law is an important part of the Indonesian legal system because it regulates the procedures for enforcing criminal law, starting from

investigations, inquiries, prosecutions, to the implementation of court decisions (Marshall, 2020). Understanding criminal procedure law is a basic need because the public has the potential to be directly involved in the legal process, whether as witnesses, victims, or parties being questioned (Kumar, 2021). However, various studies show that public understanding of legal procedures is still relatively low, resulting in frequent errors in the reporting process and legal assistance (Nutbeam, 2020).

This situation is also evident at the national level. Advances in digital technology have made it increasingly easy for people to obtain legal information through various social media platforms. However, this ease of access to information is not always accompanied by the public's ability to verify the accuracy of the information obtained. Various studies have shown that social media has significant potential to spread unverified information, which can influence public understanding of legal issues and public policy (Umar & Shah, 2018) (Zubiaga, Aker, Bontcheva, Liakata, & Procter, 2017). On the other hand, public information disclosure in Indonesia still faces challenges in terms of information literacy and access to credible legal sources, thus requiring strengthening legal literacy so that the public can understand legal information more critically and responsibly. This situation reinforces the importance of improving legal literacy as part of civic education and community empowerment (Wulandari, 2025).

In the context of higher education, as prospective teachers, Civics students play a key role in disseminating the principles of democracy, human rights, constitutional law, and legal literacy to future generations. Students enrolled in the Civics program are expected to possess a strong understanding of legal theory and legal literacy, as well as a practical understanding of criminal procedure law as a means of strengthening civic competence. Research shows that legal literacy contributes significantly to the development of civic competence and civic responsibility in Civics students (Radini, et al., 2026).

However, as a lecturer, the researcher discovered problems among students in the Civics Study Program. Based on observations of 15 fourth and sixth semester students, it was found that 66.7% still had difficulty explaining the difference between material criminal law and criminal procedural law. Furthermore, 60% were unable to systematically explain the stages of investigation and prosecution when given a simple case study. These findings indicate a gap between students' mastery of legal theory and their practical ability to understand the criminal law process (Siregar & Kemala, 2023).

Follow-up interviews with 15 Civics students revealed that 80% felt the legal material they learned during their studies was more focused on normative concepts than on actual legal practices. Sixty-six percent also stated they had never participated in a criminal justice simulation or a civics-based legal assistance program. This situation leaves students with insufficient contextual experience to understand the practical implementation of criminal procedure law.

The challenge of strengthening legal literacy is increasingly complex in the digital era. Based on observations of respondents' use of legal information media, it was found that 86.7% of students obtained legal information more often through social media than through academic sources or official legal institutions. This phenomenon has the potential to lead to legal misinformation because not all circulating information has reliable validity. Therefore, the ability to understand

criminal procedure law is increasingly important as a means of filtering legal information circulating in the digital space (Primary, 2023).

Extant literature on legal literacy has largely centered around civil society organizations, K-12 students, or general citizenship education. Although these inquiries have underscored the value of legal literacy in nurturing civic awareness, the specific role of criminal procedural law in enhancing legal literacy among higher education students—especially those in Civics Education (PPKn) majors—remains underrepresented. Moreover, previous scholarly works have frequently treated legal literacy as an isolated concept, leaving its connection with students' comprehension of criminal procedural law largely unexamined. As a result, there is a notable scholarly omission concerning how a solid grasp of criminal procedural law can foster legal literacy among future civic educators.

The distinctiveness of this study stems from its integrative framework, which bridges the gap between criminal procedural law mastery, legal literacy, and civic competence specifically for PPKn university students. While prior research has isolated these variables, this study explores their interplay to yield empirical insights into how a foundational knowledge of criminal procedural law reinforces legal literacy and builds civic competence in pre-service teachers. Consequently, this inquiry delivers meaningful theoretical and practical insights to the broader discourse on legal literacy within citizenship education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach utilizing descriptive methodology. By drawing on direct accounts from individuals actively involved in a particular social phenomenon, qualitative methods provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The researchers chose a descriptive approach because they wanted to illustrate the positive effects of learning about criminal law procedures on Civics students without altering any other factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted from March to April 2026 at the Kusuma Negara State Teacher Training College (STKIP) in Jakarta. Involvement, expertise, and understanding of criminal procedure law were considered when selecting respondents using purposive sampling. Fifteen members of the Pancasila and Citizenship Education student body and two law professors from PPKn served as informants. Table 1 shows the coding techniques used by the researchers to maintain the confidentiality of informants' identities.

Table 1. Coding of Research Informants

No.	Informant Category	Amount	Code
1	Civics students	15	P1–P15
2	PPKn Lecturer	2	D1–D2
Total		17	

The methods used to collect data were documentation studies, in-depth interviews, and observation. To determine informants' practical knowledge of criminal procedure law, we relied on observational data. Informants' perspectives, backgrounds, and perceived benefits in understanding criminal procedure law were investigated using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Meanwhile, documentation

was used to obtain supporting data in the form of teaching materials, legal education activity documents, academic records, and various other documents relevant to the research focus (Silverman, 2021).

Data validity was achieved through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from students and lecturers. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming the interview results with informants to ensure the appropriateness of the meaning and interpretation of the data obtained. This strategy is a common procedure used to increase the credibility of qualitative research (Tracy, 2020).

According to (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020) an interactive model was created for data analysis. This model has three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation was carried out by identifying and focusing on data points relevant to the research objectives." Additionally, descriptive narratives, theme tables, and matrices were used to present the data and facilitate understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fifteen students and two law professors from the PPKn Study Program participated in this study, which used observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies to reach its conclusions. The study showed that students' legal literacy improved significantly when they had a strong understanding of criminal procedure law. Based on the data analysis process, four main findings were found, namely: (1) students' understanding of criminal procedure law, (2) the benefits of understanding criminal procedure law in developing students' legal literacy, (3) the contribution of understanding criminal procedure law to students' citizenship competencies, and (4) the challenges of developing PPKn students' legal literacy. The four main findings are explained as follows:

Civics Students' Understanding of Criminal Procedure Law

Based on observations, most students understood the basic concepts of criminal procedure law, particularly its function as a guideline in the law enforcement process. Of the 15 students who served as informants, 10 were able to systematically explain the stages of investigation, inquiry, prosecution, and trial. However, 5 students still had difficulty explaining the implementation of these stages in concrete cases.

Interview results indicate that students understand criminal procedure law as an instrument for protecting citizens' rights in the judicial process. One student stated:

"I understand that criminal procedure law not only regulates perpetrators of crimes, but also protects the rights of victims, witnesses, and suspects during the legal process." (P-04)

Another student said:

"Before studying criminal procedure, I thought the law only concerned punishment. After studying it, I understand that there are procedures that must be followed to achieve justice." (P-09)

These findings were reinforced by the results of interviews with lecturers.

"Students are generally able to understand the concept of criminal procedural law, but still need to delve deeper into its application in actual cases." (D-01)

Research findings indicate that students' understanding of criminal procedure law has developed conceptually, but still requires strengthening in its application. This understanding forms a crucial foundation for developing legal literacy because it enables students to understand the relationship between law, citizen rights, and the law enforcement process.

This finding is in line with research which explains that students' legal literacy develops through the ability to understand legal concepts and connect them to social life (Mas'ud, Izhatullaili, Doko, & Jama, 2025). In addition, other research confirms that civic education has a strategic function in building legal understanding that supports the formation of critical and responsible citizens (Kusnadi, 2024). Thus, an understanding of criminal procedure law not only enriches students' legal knowledge but also serves as a foundation for developing critical thinking skills, legal awareness, and civic responsibility, which are essential for a democratic life.

The Benefits of Understanding Criminal Procedure Law in Developing Students' Legal Literacy

Interview results indicated that understanding criminal procedure law significantly improved students' legal literacy. Thirteen students reported a better understanding of citizens' rights and obligations after studying criminal procedure law.

One informant said:

"After studying criminal procedure law, I have a better understanding of how citizens' rights are protected when faced with legal proceedings." (P-07)

Another informant explained:

"Criminal procedural law material helps me understand legal procedures so that I don't easily believe legal information that doesn't have a clear source." (P-12)

Observation results also show that students who have a good understanding of law are more active in participating in discussions on legal issues, democracy, and human rights both inside and outside of lectures.

The lecturer also confirmed the findings.

"Students who understand criminal procedural law usually have better abilities in analyzing legal issues that develop in society." (D-02)

Understanding criminal procedure law contributes to improving students' legal literacy by helping them grasp legal mechanisms more comprehensively. Legal literacy encompasses not only the ability to understand legal rules but also the ability to use legal information appropriately in social life.

This finding supports previous findings which explain that civics learning has an impact on increasing students' legal awareness (Sila, 2024). This finding is also in line with other research which explains that understanding the legal process is an important factor in the formation of individual legal awareness (Yudhayana & Aziz,

2024). Therefore, understanding criminal procedural law is an important element in developing students' legal literacy because it fosters the ability to critically understand, interpret, and apply legal knowledge in various contexts of social and national life.

Contribution of Understanding Criminal Procedure Law to Students' Citizenship Competence

The research results show that understanding criminal procedure law also strengthens students' civic competence. Fourteen students stated that the criminal procedure law material helped them understand the implementation of the rule of law principle in social life.

One student stated:

"I have come to understand more that every citizen has equal standing before the law and has the right to receive fair treatment." (P-03)

Another student said:

"Understanding the law makes me more critical in viewing various legal cases reported in the media." (P-14)

Observational results show that students who have a strong understanding of law are more likely to contribute to class discussions and express themselves with confidence when debating citizenship and legal issues.

According to the lecturer:

"Understanding criminal procedural law is highly relevant to the competencies of Civics students because they are prepared to become educators who teach the values of democracy, human rights, and legal awareness." (D-01)

These findings indicate that an understanding of criminal procedure law significantly contributes to strengthening students' civic competence. Legal knowledge helps students understand the values of democracy, justice, and the rule of law, which are the foundations of national life.

The results of this study support research which explains that civic education functions to form citizens who have civic knowledge and civic responsibility (Mulyono, 2017). This finding is also in line with research that confirms that legal literacy is an important part of 21st-century citizenship competency (Mugara, et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening the understanding of criminal procedural law needs to be seen as an integral part of civic education because it contributes to the formation of citizens who are critical, legally aware, and able to actively participate in realizing a just democratic life.

Challenges in Developing Legal Literacy for Civics Students

While understanding criminal procedure law offers numerous benefits, this study identified several challenges in developing students' legal literacy. Interviews revealed that nine students stated that legal terms were still difficult to understand due to the use of formal and technical language.

One student said:

“Many legal terms are difficult to understand so I have to read them repeatedly to understand their meaning.” (P-05)

Another student stated:

"Sometimes the legal information circulating on social media is different from what is learned in class, making it confusing for me to determine which is correct." (P-11)

Observation results also show that some students still rely on social media as the main source of legal information compared to scientific journals or official legal sources.

According to the lecturer:

"The biggest challenge today is how to connect legal theory with the realities that are developing in society and how to accustom students to using credible legal sources." (D-02)

Research findings indicate that the complexity of legal language and high exposure to digital information are key challenges in developing students' legal literacy. This situation requires more contextual and experience-based learning strategies to enable students to understand the law more deeply. This finding is in line with research that explains that digital legal literacy is a crucial need in dealing with increasingly complex information flows (Jannati & Dinata, 2025). In addition, it was emphasized in other research that participatory and problem-solving-based learning can improve students' understanding of law and civic awareness (Keba, Kollo, Funan, Atamukin, & Bura, 2026).

Overall, an understanding of criminal procedure law has been shown to play a crucial role in developing the legal literacy of Civics (PPKn) students. However, strengthening legal literacy requires learning innovations that integrate conceptual and practical aspects so that students can apply legal knowledge effectively in both academic and social life.

Students in the Civics (PPKn) course developed a conceptual model explaining the relationship between their understanding of criminal procedure law, their legal literacy development, and their civic competence based on data analysis from observations, interviews, and documentation. This model was structured around key themes identified during the research and various factors influencing the students' legal literacy development process. The model's findings are presented in Figure 1.

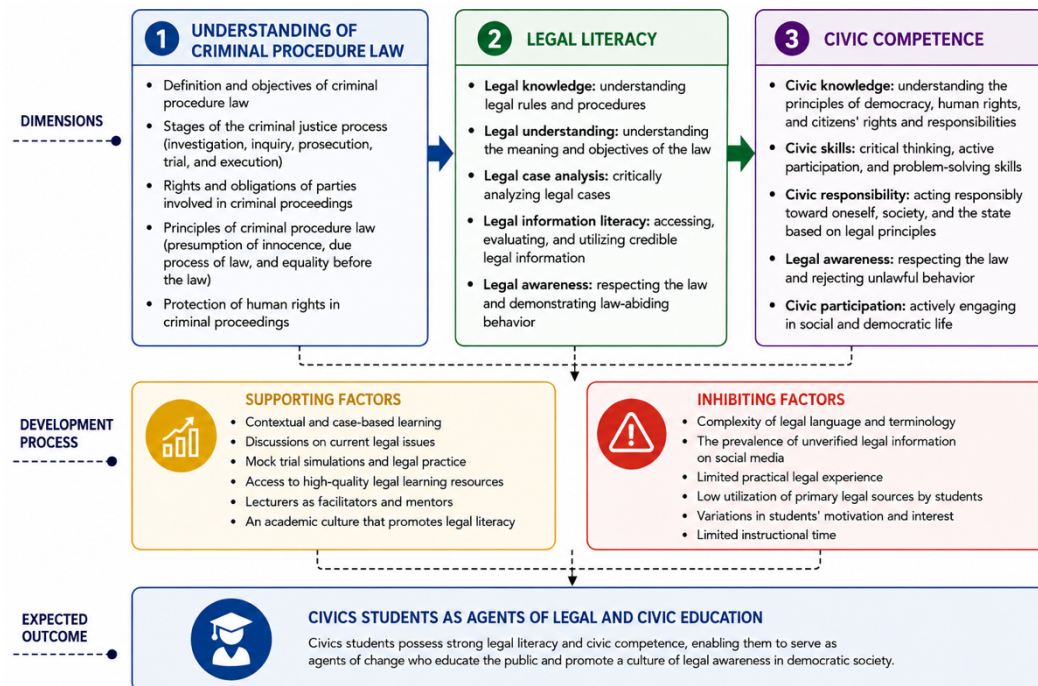


Figure 1. Model for Developing Legal Literacy for Civics Students through Understanding Criminal Procedure Law

Figure 1 shows that an understanding of criminal procedure law is the main foundation in developing legal literacy for Civics (PPKn) students. "This understanding includes mastery of the basic concepts of criminal procedure law, the stages of the criminal justice process, the rights and obligations of the parties in the legal process, and the principles of law enforcement that uphold justice and the protection of human rights." The better a student's understanding of these aspects, the greater their ability to understand and use legal information appropriately.

An understanding of criminal procedure law further contributes to the development of students' legal literacy, demonstrated by increased legal knowledge, legal understanding, the ability to analyze legal cases, the ability to access credible legal sources, and a growing legal awareness. Optimally developed legal literacy then strengthens students' civic competencies, which include civic knowledge, civic skills, civic responsibility, legal awareness, and civic participation.

The research findings model also shows that the legal literacy development process is influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include case study-based learning, discussions of current legal issues, trial simulations, access to quality legal sources, and the role of lecturers as learning facilitators. Conversely, inhibiting factors include the complexity of legal terminology, the dominance of unverified legal information from social media, limited legal practice experience, and students' low utilization of primary legal sources.

Ultimately, the integration of criminal procedure law understanding and legal literacy results in stronger civic competencies, enabling Civics students to act as agents of legal and civic education. This role is realized through students' ability to

disseminate legal knowledge, increase public legal awareness, and foster a democratic and just legal culture in their social environment.

CONCLUSION

This research validates that a solid command of criminal procedural law is pivotal in enhancing the legal literacy of Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) students. Legal literacy extends beyond a basic grasp of statutory concepts; it encompasses the capacity to critically analyze legal phenomena, identify constitutional rights within the criminal justice framework, and implement legal theory in practical contexts. The data reveal that while students' foundational knowledge of criminal procedural law is generally sufficient, an empirical gap persists when it comes to transforming this theoretical insight into functional legal analysis and active civic engagement.

Conceptually, this inquiry enriches the literature on legal literacy by broadening its scope—moving past superficial legal awareness toward a structured integration of criminal procedural law within the civic education paradigm. It underscores that proficiency in criminal procedural law is a vital component of civic competence, particularly for pre-service PPKn teachers who bear the responsibility of fostering public legal awareness and democratic citizenship.

From a practical standpoint, these insights offer strategic guidance for curriculum design in PPKn departments. Legal literacy can be reinforced through immersive and contextual pedagogical methods, such as case-method analysis, mock trials, debates on contemporary legal dilemmas, and community-based legal advocacy projects. These strategies serve to reconcile the dichotomy between abstract legal theory and applied understanding. Furthermore, this study signals a policy need for higher education policy-makers to institutionalize and standardize legal studies within civic education curricula. Elevating legal literacy through structured academic programs will ultimately produce educators with robust civic competence, heightened legal consciousness, and a steadfast dedication to democratic principles and the rule of law.

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