

Early Development of Legal Awareness and Civic Responsibility in Elementary Education

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Abstract

Legal awareness constitutes a foundational dimension of civic character that should be cultivated from elementary school through values-based citizenship education. This study aimed to analyse the concept of legal awareness among elementary school children, examine the meaning of citizens' rights and obligations in basic education, and identify the roles of schools, teachers, families, and instructional strategies in fostering rule-abiding behaviour. Employing a descriptive qualitative design based on library research, the study drew data from books, journal articles, legislation, and policy documents. The data were analysed through content analysis involving reduction, categorisation, interpretation, and argumentative synthesis. The findings indicate that children's legal awareness is reflected in their ability to recognise rules, understand behavioural boundaries, and accept the consequences of their actions in everyday life. Citizenship education plays a strategic role by connecting rights and obligations with concrete practices, including discipline, cleanliness, orderly queuing, mutual respect, and compliance with school regulations. Schools strengthen legal awareness through curriculum integration, teacher role modelling, consistent rule enforcement, and habituation activities, while family

support reinforces the internalisation of these values. Effective implementation is supported by a relevant civic education curriculum, an orderly school culture, and collaboration with parents, whereas limited teacher understanding, inconsistent family role models, digital media influences, and weak rule enforcement constitute major constraints. The study concludes that early legal awareness education is essential for developing discipline, honesty, responsibility, and social concern among children. These findings contribute a conceptual framework for strengthening citizenship education practices and coordinated school–family efforts to develop responsible and law-abiding citizens from an early age.

Keywords: Citizenship Education; Elementary Education; Legal Awareness; Rights and Obligations; Student Character

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping the whole person, encompassing not only cognitive aspects but also affective and social behavior. In the Indonesian context, education is directed at developing students' potential to become faithful, noble, competent, intelligent, and responsible citizens, as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Ichsan, Ibad, et al., 2023). Therefore, education is inseparable from efforts to shape civic character, including awareness of laws, norms, rights, and obligations as citizens.

Legal awareness is not merely knowledge of written rules, but encompasses understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that demonstrate compliance with prevailing social norms. Within the framework of civic education, legal awareness is a crucial part of the internalization of values, enabling students to distinguish between right and wrong, proper and improper, and rights and obligations in communal life. Theoretically, children's moral development also demonstrates that understanding of rules develops gradually through interaction with the social environment, thus early education is crucial for the quality of a child's moral reasoning (Hammond, 2014).

Elementary school is a highly strategic stage for instilling legal awareness because children are in an early phase of moral development that is relatively easy to shape through habituation, role modelling, and repeated behaviour. At this stage, children begin to learn that rules are not only restrictive but also serve to maintain order, justice, and communal

well-being. Piaget's perspective on moral development holds that children begin to understand rules through social experiences and interactions with those around them, so schools play a fundamental role in guiding the internalisation of these values (Carpendale, 2010).

The urgency of instilling legal awareness from elementary school onward is also related to education's role as a means of preventing future deviant behaviour. If students are not accustomed from an early age to understanding rules, respecting the rights of others, and fulfilling their obligations, there is the potential for low discipline, a lack of responsibility, and weak adherence to social norms. In the context of character education, cultivating a culture of rule-abiding behavior not only fosters order in schools but also builds social capital for a more orderly and civilized democratic life.(Berkowitz, 2012)

Normatively, the rights and obligations of citizens in the field of education are guaranteed by the constitution. The 1945 Constitution affirms that every citizen has the right to education and the government is obliged to finance basic education. Furthermore, Law Number 20 of 2003 also places the rights and obligations of citizens, parents, the community, and the government within a national education system aimed at educating the nation. Based on this, learning in elementary schools should be directed not only at academic achievement but also at a substantive understanding of citizenship and legal order. In practice, Pancasila and Citizenship Education (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan/PPKn*) plays a crucial role as a systematic vehicle for instilling the values of citizen rights and obligations. PPKn learning should not stop at memorizing concepts but should instead lead to the formation of attitudes and habits of abiding by the rules through contextual learning experiences. Studies on legal awareness in PKN/PPKn learning in elementary schools show that student understanding can be enhanced through interactive, contextual approaches and habits relevant to everyday life (Sabilla et al., 2025).

However, the reality on the ground shows that elementary school students' understanding of legal awareness still varies. This difference is influenced by the family environment, parenting styles, school culture, and teachers' learning strategies in presenting civics material. Some students are able to demonstrate compliance with regulations, while others still require more intensive and ongoing guidance. This situation indicates that instilling legal awareness is not always optimal, necessitating a more systematic study of the supporting and inhibiting factors (Nurlita et al., 2024). Family and school are two primary

environments that influence the development of children's legal awareness (Ichsan, Samsudin, et al., 2023). The family serves as the primary space for internalizing values, while schools reinforce these values through rules, learning, and a culture of discipline. If the values instilled at home align with those developed at school, the process of developing rule-abiding behavior will be more effective. Conversely, a lack of synchronization between the two can weaken the desired habituation. Therefore, legal awareness education needs to be understood as a collaborative process between teachers, parents, and the child's social environment (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Several previous studies have shown that the implementation of legal awareness and civic obligations from an early age in elementary schools is crucial as a foundation for the formation of civic character. Benu et al. (2026) emphasized that Civic Education in elementary schools plays a significant role in instilling a just legal awareness through understanding rights and obligations, internalizing the values of justice, and cultivating discipline, responsibility, and honesty, through learning strategies such as discussions, case studies, simulations, and an orderly school culture. In line with this, research on the concept of legal learning for elementary school students through Civics shows that thematically integrated legal learning is oriented towards cognitive theory, with outcomes in the form of legal interpretation skills, legal literacy, and legal rhetoric (Fatahillah, 2023). While its application is carried out through internalization of material, habituation, application of attitudes and values, and the formation of student identity. Furthermore, studies on legal awareness extension for elementary school students emphasize that introducing basic law from elementary school can increase students' knowledge of the law, foster responsibility, and minimize violations due to ignorance of applicable regulations (Wantu et al., 2025). In addition, recent research on strengthening constitutional literacy from an early age also shows that understanding of citizens' rights and obligations needs to be strengthened at the elementary level because there are still limitations in students' understanding of the concept of the constitution and their civic roles, so that early citizenship education becomes a strategic instrument in forming legally aware and responsible citizens (Yolandari et al., 2026).

Based on the above description, this research is important to examine the concept of legal awareness in elementary school children, the rights and obligations of citizens from a basic education perspective, and the role of schools and learning strategies that can be applied in fostering compliance with regulations. This study is also relevant to identifying supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and the impact of implementing legal awareness on student

character development. Using a literature study approach, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of character and citizenship education in elementary schools.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research approach. This approach was chosen because the research focused on reviewing, interpreting, and analyzing various written sources relevant to the issue of legal awareness and civic obligations among elementary school students, without involving direct field data collection (Adlini et al., 2022).

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included textbooks, national and international scientific journal articles, previous research findings, laws and regulations related to civic education, and relevant educational policy documents. Secondary sources consisted of supporting writings that enriched the analysis of the study's focus (Adji, 2024; Suwendra, 2018). Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques, namely by searching, selecting, and compiling literature relevant to the research topic from electronic journal databases, digital libraries, and other academic sources. All references were managed using the Mendeley application to facilitate citation organization and bibliography.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which systematically examined the contents of various literature sources to identify themes relevant to the problem formulation. The analysis process is carried out in four stages, namely: (1) data reduction by selecting relevant and up-to-date literature; (2) data presentation in the form of thematic categorization; (3) data interpretation by comparing and linking findings between sources; and (4) drawing conclusions based on argumentative synthesis of all the literature that has been reviewed (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018; Rosidah et al., 2023).

RESULTS

The Concept of Legal Awareness in Elementary School Children

Legal awareness can be understood as a person's understanding and appreciation of applicable legal values, which is reflected in an attitude of voluntary obedience and compliance with regulations without coercion (Soekanto, 2018). In the context of elementary

school-aged children, legal awareness cannot be interpreted as an understanding of the formal and abstract legal system, but rather their ability to recognize the existence of rules, understand the limits of permissible behavior, and accept the consequences of each action. Thus, legal awareness in children is the initial foundation for the formation of a disciplined character and social responsibility.

At this stage of development, elementary school children tend to understand rules through direct experience in everyday life. They learn that every environment, such as home and school, has rules that must be followed to ensure orderly and harmonious community life (Irawan, 2023). This awareness is evident in simple behaviors, such as arriving on time, adhering to classroom rules, lining up in an orderly manner, and respecting the rights of peers in learning and playing. Therefore, legal awareness in children is more accurately understood as the internalization of values of social order and obedience that are still at a basic stage.

The moral development of elementary school-aged children also shows that they are beginning to understand the reasons why rules are made: to maintain communal comfort and order, not simply because of the threat of punishment (Yusuf, 2018). This shift in understanding is important because it lays the foundation for developing a more mature legal awareness later in life. If children obey only out of fear of punishment, then such compliance will be temporary; conversely, if children understand the meaning of the rules, then compliance will develop into a conscious and responsible attitude. It demonstrates that legal education for children should be directed at developing an understanding of values, not simply mechanical enforcement of rules.

Therefore, fostering legal awareness in elementary school-aged children requires a concrete, enjoyable, and habit-oriented approach. Strategies such as stories, role-playing, simulations, simple discussions, and the role models of teachers and parents are highly effective in helping children understand the meaning of rules in everyday life (Aditiya et al., 2025). Through these approaches, children not only learn the rules but also learn to appreciate their importance for themselves and others. Thus, legal awareness in elementary school children provides an important foundation for developing disciplined, responsible citizens who value an orderly social life.

Rights and Obligations of Citizens from the Perspective of Elementary Education

The rights and obligations of citizens are two interrelated and inseparable aspects of national life. From a primary education perspective, this concept is crucial in civics (PPKn)

learning because it introduces students to the initial understanding that every individual has rights that must be respected and obligations that must be fulfilled (Susilawati et al., 2025). At the elementary school level, rights and obligations are usually presented through examples that are close to children's lives, such as the right to an education, play, and feel safe at school, as well as the obligation to obey rules, respect teachers, and maintain a clean learning environment. This approach is important because early childhood learning helps students connect the concept of citizenship to real-life experiences, making these values easier to understand and apply.

Furthermore, the introduction of rights and obligations from elementary school serves as the foundation for developing the character of responsible citizens. Children need to understand that rights do not stand alone but always go hand in hand with obligations; that is, the freedom to obtain something must be accompanied by a willingness to assume responsibility. In this context, elementary education not only teaches cognitive knowledge about rights and obligations but also fosters attitudes of discipline, caring, and respect for others. This process is relevant to the goal of civic education, which is to foster awareness that communal life can only be harmonious if everyone not only demands their rights but also fulfills their obligations in a balanced manner (Setyaningrum & Aini, 2026).

Therefore, learning about rights and obligations in elementary school plays a strategic role in shaping citizens from an early age. Students who understand this concept are expected to grow into individuals who are aware of the rules, respect the rights of others, and are able to put the common good above personal interests when necessary. In the long term, strengthening this understanding will foster a healthy culture of citizenship, where participation, responsibility, and adherence to norms become part of everyday behavior. Therefore, elementary education is not only a vehicle for acquiring knowledge, but also a space for cultivating democratic values and social responsibility that characterize good citizens (Krüger et al., 2023).

The Importance of Instilling Legal Awareness from an Early Age

Instilling legal awareness from an early age is crucial because childhood is the golden age for the formation of a child's character, habits, and moral orientation. During this period, the values imparted tend to be more easily absorbed, internalized, and retained within students, thus becoming the foundation of their behavior into adulthood. Therefore, legal

education at an early age serves not only to introduce rules but also to shape children's perspectives on right and wrong, order and disorder, and the social responsibilities inherent in everyday life (Rohmah, 2026).

Furthermore, instilling legal awareness from an early age plays a crucial role in preventing the development of a permissive attitude toward violations. Children who are accustomed to understanding the rationale behind rules from a young age will be better able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate actions, both within the family, school, and community. If this awareness is neglected, it is possible to create a generation that views violations as normal, resulting in weakened compliance with rules and minimal self-control (Aulina, 2013).

Beyond being a preventative measure, instilling legal awareness from elementary school age also supports the ongoing development of students' character. This is evident in the prevention of behaviors such as bullying, cheating on exams, disciplinary violations, and other actions that harm oneself or others. Therefore, early legal awareness education is not simply a transfer of knowledge about rules, but rather a process of habituating values that foster responsibility, discipline, and a concern for the common good.

The Role of Schools in Shaping Students' Legal Awareness

Schools play a central role as formal educational institutions in shaping students' legal awareness, as they internalize values, knowledge, and habits related to compliance with regulations. Through the curriculum, school policies, and an orderly learning culture, students are not only taught to understand legal concepts theoretically but are also guided to recognize the importance of rules in maintaining public order (Suparlan, 2020). In this context, schools serve as a space for initial legal socialization, introducing students to the relationship between rights, obligations, and social responsibilities.

Teachers play a key role in this process because, in addition to delivering learning materials, they also serve as behavioral models for students in their daily lives at school. Teachers' exemplary behavior in being disciplined, honest, fair, and obedient to rules will be more easily imitated by students, especially those of elementary school age who are still imitating the behavior of adults around them (Khasanah, 2025). Therefore, fostering legal awareness cannot be achieved simply through lectures or conceptual explanations; it must be supported by consistent, concrete practices from educators.

In addition to classroom learning, schools also instill legal awareness through the consistent and fair implementation of rules and regulations for all members of the school community. Activities such as flag ceremonies, class duty, community service, and various extracurricular activities are not merely routine activities, but rather a means of habituating to instill discipline, responsibility, and adherence to shared rules (Alfina et al., 2025). Through these activities, students learn that laws and regulations are not burdens, but rather guidelines that maintain order, togetherness, and a comfortable school environment.

Consistency in enforcing rules is a determining factor in a school's success in fostering legal awareness in students, as rules that are implemented firmly, fairly, and consistently foster an understanding that every violation has consequences. Conversely, if rules are only in effect for a short time or are applied inconsistently, students tend to view the law as negotiable. Therefore, schools need to build a culture of discipline that is integrated into all educational activities so that legal awareness develops not only as knowledge, but as attitudes and habits in everyday life (Hanik et al., 2021).

Strategy for Implementing Legal Awareness in Elementary Schools

The strategy for instilling legal awareness in elementary schools needs to be designed as an integrated values education process, not simply the delivery of normative material. Integrating legal and civic values into Civics (PPKn) learning and other subjects through a thematic approach is crucial because elementary school students are still in the concrete thinking stage and require examples relevant to everyday life (Junaedi, 2020). In this context, teachers need not simply explain the rules but relate them to students' real-life experiences, such as queuing in an orderly manner, respecting the rights of their peers, maintaining cleanliness, and adhering to classroom rules. Thus, law is understood not as an abstract concept, but as a functional and relevant guideline for living together.

In addition to material integration, consistent and fair implementation of school rules is the primary means of cultivating the habit of obeying the rules. Consistency is crucial because children learn from repeated patterns and from the school environment's role models; rules that are enforced firmly but proportionately will shape students' perception that the law applies to all without exception. To strengthen understanding, schools can also use a variety of learning methods such as role-playing, group discussions, and simple case studies that are close to children's world (Sagala, 2019). These methods help students not

only understand the rules but also develop their ability to assess situations, make appropriate decisions, and understand the consequences of rule-breaking behavior.

DISCUSSION

Implementation of Citizenship Obligations in School Life

The implementation of civic obligations in school life is essentially a process of habituating civic values in the space closest to students. Obligations such as being on time, obeying rules, wearing uniforms according to regulations, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting teachers and peers are not merely administrative disciplines, but rather initial training for developing responsible, orderly, and rule-conscious citizens. In this context, schools function as a model of national life, as students' daily behavior reflects how they will later carry out their obligations in the wider society (Sutarman, 2020).

Furthermore, school obligations also play a role in internalizing the value of adherence to social norms and public ethics. When students are accustomed to following schedules, maintaining shared facilities, and actively participating in classroom and school activities, they learn that individual freedom is always accompanied by collective responsibility. This means that citizenship education does not stop at a theoretical understanding of rights and obligations, but is realized through concrete experiences that instill an awareness that social order arises from adherence to shared rules (Ikhwanudin et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the Monday flag ceremony holds significant educational significance in fostering national awareness. This activity is not merely a formal routine but also a symbolic means of fostering respect for the nation, appreciating the struggles of the nation's founders, and strengthening their identity as Indonesian citizens (Pujianingsih et al., 2024). Through this habit, students learn to understand that civic obligations include respecting national symbols, maintaining unity, and embodying national values in their daily behavior.

Therefore, implementing civic obligations in schools is a crucial foundation for developing civic character from an early age. Schools are not only places for the transfer of knowledge but also spaces for the formation of social habits that train students to become disciplined, caring individuals, respectful of rules, and committed to living together (Harianto et al., 2025). If these values are consistently internalized, schools will produce a generation

that is not only academically intelligent but also mature in their awareness of being good and responsible citizens.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementing Legal Awareness in Elementary School Students

Instilling legal awareness in elementary school students is a crucial part of character and citizenship education because at this age, children begin to develop an initial understanding of rules, responsibilities, and the consequences of behavior. In this context, schools play a strategic role as a space for the socialization of legal values that are simple, concrete, and relevant to students' daily lives (Nada & Khasanah, 2025). Therefore, the success of instilling legal awareness is determined not only by the learning materials but also by an educational ecosystem that consistently supports the internalization of these values.

One key supporting factor is the existence of a Civics (PPKn) curriculum that explicitly includes material on the rights and obligations of citizens, regulations, and the importance of compliance with social and legal norms. This curriculum serves as a conceptual foundation for teachers to integrate legal awareness into the learning process. Furthermore, firm yet educational school policies, teachers' exemplary adherence to rules, and an orderly and disciplined school environment contribute to fostering law-abiding behavior in students (Fatimah et al., 2025). In such situations, students not only understand the rules theoretically but also see their application in everyday practice.

Another supporting factor comes from the family, particularly parental support in implementing values aligned with school education. When parents accustom their children to obeying rules, respecting the rights of others, and being responsible at home, the legal awareness values learned at school will be more easily internalized (Waskito & Suyahman, 2025). Synergy between schools and families is crucial because elementary school-aged children are still highly dependent on the reinforcement of values from their immediate environment (Ichsan, 2020, 2026; Ichsan et al., 2026). Therefore, legal awareness education does not stop with formal learning but develops through ongoing social habits.

On the other hand, the implementation of legal awareness also faces several obstacles. One is the limited understanding of some teachers regarding the most effective approach to instilling legal awareness in elementary school-aged children. If learning is still dominated by lectures and memorization, legal values tend to be understood abstractly and

have little impact on students' actual behavior. Another obstacle comes from a family environment that lacks role models, resulting in a mismatch between the values taught at school and the practices children experience at home (Nursalim et al., 2025). This condition can weaken the process of internalizing legal awareness.

Furthermore, the influence of the social environment, uncontrolled use of digital media, and social media also pose serious challenges to developing students' legal awareness. Children can easily be exposed to behavior that is inconsistent with norms, weakening the values of discipline and adherence to rules (Ichsan, 2019; Ichsan et al., 2026). Inconsistency in school rule enforcement also exacerbates the situation, as students see that rules can be treated differently. Therefore, legal awareness in elementary school students can only be optimally developed if there is continuity between the curriculum, teacher role models, family support, and consistent school regulations.

The Impact of Implementing Legal Awareness on the Character of Elementary School Students

The implementation of legal awareness from elementary school plays a strategic role in the ongoing development of students' character. At this stage of development, children are still internalizing values, so familiarizing themselves with rules, norms, and regulations will more easily shape lasting behavior. Through consistent learning, students not only understand that rules must be obeyed, but also begin to recognize the moral and social reasons behind their existence. This impacts the development of discipline, responsibility, and self-control in various daily life situations (Muslich, 2022).

Furthermore, effectively instilling legal awareness can strengthen the character of honesty and respect for the rights of others. Students who are accustomed to understanding the consequences of violating rules are more likely to behave according to norms and avoid behavior that is detrimental to themselves or others. In the school context, this is reflected in the habit of obeying rules, being orderly while studying, and respecting teachers and peers. Ultimately, legal awareness forms a crucial foundation for the development of orderly, just, and responsible social behavior (Zubaedi, 2020).

In addition to fostering compliance, legal awareness education also contributes to the development of students' leadership and social awareness. When children understand that rules are created to maintain order and the common good, they learn to see themselves as

part of a community with social obligations. This understanding encourages students to focus not only on personal interests but also on considering the impact of their actions on others. Thus, legal awareness serves as a means of character education that fosters participatory attitudes, caring, and the ability to cooperate in community life (Nugroho, 2020).

Overall, implementing legal awareness in elementary schools does not merely foster compliance with formal regulations but also forms the foundation of good citizenship. Values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social awareness will develop more easily if instilled from an early age through habituation and role modeling. Therefore, integrating legal awareness into elementary education is a crucial step in developing a generation that not only obeys the law but also possesses moral integrity and is prepared to become members of a civilized society (Sila, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that legal awareness in elementary school students is not merely the ability to recognize rules, but a foundational civic disposition that grows through habituation, role modelling, and meaningful learning experiences. The findings further indicate that the internalization of citizens' rights and obligations, when supported by consistent school discipline, teacher exemplarity, and family-school synergy, contributes significantly to the formation of disciplined, responsible, honest, and socially aware character. Therefore, strengthening legal awareness from an early age through contextual PPKn learning and an orderly school culture is essential for preparing a generation of citizens who understand, respect, and practice legal and civic values in everyday life.

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