

Improving Legal Literacy in Village Communities through a Citizens' Rights and Obligations Education Program

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Abstract

The low level of legal literacy in rural communities often leads to various social problems, such as inter-resident conflicts, rights violations, and low community participation in the village development process. This community service program aims to improve community understanding of the rights and obligations of citizens through participatory and applicable legal outreach activities. The implementation method includes identifying community needs, developing outreach materials, and implementing legal education through interactive lectures, group discussions, and simple case simulations relevant to village life. The activities also include the distribution of educational modules as a medium for continuous learning. Evaluation of the activities was carried out through pre- and post-tests to measure improvements in participant understanding, as well as participatory observation during the activities. The results of the activities showed an increase in community understanding of the rights and obligations of citizens, particularly regarding compliance with the law, conflict resolution through deliberation, and awareness of the importance of participation in village development. In addition, the community demonstrated increased awareness in accessing legal services and government administration correctly. This program has had a positive impact on increasing legal awareness and strengthening the relationship between the community and village officials in creating an orderly and harmonious social order. Thus, a village-based legal counseling program can be an effective legal empowerment model to improve the quality of social life in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Legal Literacy, Legal Counseling, Citizens' Rights And Obligations, Village Communities

Introduction

Legal literacy is a crucial element in social and national life because it provides the foundation for citizens to understand their rights, obligations, and available legal protection mechanisms (Nugraha et al., 2023). An adequate level of legal understanding fosters a law-abiding society capable of resolving problems constitutionally and actively participating in social development and local governance. However, in reality, rural communities still face limited access to legal information and a poor understanding of applicable regulations, including those related to population administration, village resource management, and dispute resolution mechanisms. This situation often leads to communities being unaware of

their rights and lacking an understanding of the legal obligations they must fulfill in social life and village administration (Friedman, 1975; Soekanto, 2007).

Low legal literacy increases the potential for social conflict, individual rights violations, and administrative disorder at the village level, such as land disputes, family conflicts, and public service issues. Furthermore, a lack of legal awareness can hinder community participation in village development because residents do not fully understand their roles and responsibilities as part of the local government system (Maulana et al., 2025). Therefore, increasing awareness of citizens' rights and obligations is a crucial factor in creating participatory, legally orderly, and welfare-oriented village governance. Legal education efforts through outreach programs are a crucial strategy for strengthening community legal culture so that village development can be sustainable and inclusive (Nonet & Selznick, 1978; Bedner, 2010).

The target village communities generally have social characteristics that are still strongly influenced by kinship ties and local customary values, with primary livelihoods in agriculture, small trade, and household-based micro-enterprises. However, village social and economic development is often not accompanied by an increase in community legal understanding, resulting in frequent administrative and social problems (Elfira & Santosa, 2023; Oktarina et al., 2021). Common legal issues at the village level include land boundary disputes, inheritance conflicts, population administration issues, and social conflicts between residents, which are often resolved informally without adequate understanding of applicable legal procedures. This situation indicates that community capacity to understand and manage legal issues still requires strengthening through a systematic and ongoing educational approach (Soekanto, 2007; Bedner, 2010).

Furthermore, limited access to legal information and the lack of legal outreach activities in rural areas contribute to communities' lack of understanding of their legal rights and obligations as citizens. Geographical factors, limited information facilities (Tehupeiory & Naibaho, 2020), and low levels of legal literacy are key obstacles to disseminating legal information to rural communities. As a result, communities tend to rely on informal information that may not comply with applicable legal provisions. Therefore, interventions in the form of contextual legal education and outreach programs are needed to enable villagers to understand the correct legal mechanisms and to increase legal awareness in social life and village government administration more effectively (Nonet & Selznick, 1978; Friedman, 1975).

The urgency of community service programs in the field of legal literacy is increasing due to the low level of understanding among rural communities of applicable legal norms and mechanisms (Ningsih et al., 2023; Yulianti, 2020). Educational interventions through legal counseling are a strategic step to provide a practical understanding of citizens' rights and obligations, enabling communities to resolve social issues legally and constructively. In this context, universities play a crucial role as agents of change through the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, particularly community service, which aims to empower communities to understand and utilize the law as a means of protecting their rights and resolving conflicts fairly. Systematic and sustainable legal counseling has been

shown to increase public legal awareness and strengthen legal culture at the local level (Friedman, 1975; Nonet & Selznick, 1978).

This community service program offers a solution by providing counseling on citizens' rights and obligations using a participatory approach tailored to the needs and social context of rural communities. This approach involves group discussions, case simulations, and practical education on frequently occurring legal issues, making the material easier to understand and relevant to residents' daily lives (Vissandjée et al., 2017). Assisting communities in understanding administrative procedures and dispute resolution mechanisms is also a crucial part of this program, ensuring that they not only acquire theoretical legal knowledge but also develop practical skills in resolving the legal issues they face (Soekanto, 2007; Bedner, 2010).

This program aims to increase public understanding of the rights and obligations of citizens, strengthen legal awareness in rural communities, and encourage active citizen participation in creating a legally orderly social life. Increased legal awareness is expected to reduce the potential for social conflict, increase compliance with village administrative regulations, and strengthen the relationship between the community and village officials in the development process. Therefore, a community empowerment-based legal outreach program can be a strategic step in building a legally aware village community capable of actively participating in sustainable development (Bedner, 2010; Soekanto, 2007).

Research Methods

This community service activity implements a participatory approach with a legal education model based on the needs of the village community. The activity begins with problem identification through field observations and discussions with village officials and community leaders to map the community's level of legal understanding and the types of legal problems that frequently arise. Next, the community service team develops educational materials tailored to local needs, particularly regarding the rights and obligations of citizens in social life and village administration. The activities are implemented through interactive legal counseling, group discussions, simple case simulations, and the distribution of educational materials to ensure participants understand the material in a practical and contextual way.

Evaluation of the activities is conducted using pre- and post-test methods to measure improvements in participants' understanding after participating in the outreach activities. Furthermore, evaluation is conducted through participant observation during the activities and reflective discussions to determine the community's response and further needs regarding legal education. The evaluation data is analyzed descriptively to illustrate changes in the community's level of legal understanding after the program is implemented. This approach is expected to have a tangible impact on increasing legal awareness in the village community while encouraging the sustainability of the community empowerment-based legal literacy program.

Result and Discussion

The results of the community service program demonstrated a significant increase in the village community's understanding of citizen rights and obligations after participating in legal counseling activities. Based on pre- and post-test evaluations, community understanding improved across various aspects, including understanding of citizen rights, legal obligations, awareness of legal administration, and mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution. Participants who previously lacked understanding of village administration procedures and simple legal mechanisms demonstrated improved understanding of administrative services and procedures for resolving legal disputes at the village level.

In addition to improving cognitive aspects, the program also resulted in changes in community attitudes toward the importance of legal compliance in social life. Case discussions and simple conflict simulations helped the community understand how to resolve disputes through deliberation and legitimate administrative channels, thereby reducing the potential for social conflict. Village officials also experienced positive impacts in the form of increased citizen participation in village administration and development activities. Other findings indicate that a participatory and contextual approach is key to the program's success. The counseling materials, tailored to real-world community issues, made it easier for participants to understand and apply legal knowledge in their daily lives. Therefore, a local needs-based legal counseling program can be a model for effective and sustainable legal empowerment for village communities.

The graphs shown show an increase in public understanding after the program was implemented across four key indicators of legal literacy: understanding of citizens' rights, obligations, awareness of legal administration, and understanding of conflict resolution. The graphs show an increase in the average scores of participants after participating in the legal outreach activities can be seen in Figure 1.

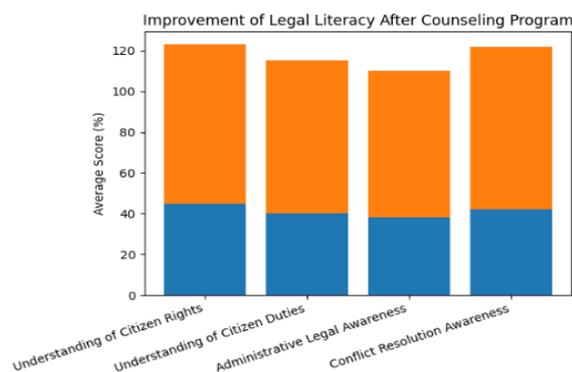


Figure.1 Improvement of Legal Literacy After Counseling Program

The graph shows an increase in the level of legal literacy among village communities following the implementation of the citizen rights and obligations outreach program across all measured indicators. The most visible improvement was in the understanding of citizens' rights and awareness of conflict resolution, which previously ranked low and then rose to a good level after the program. The understanding of citizens' obligations and awareness of legal administration also experienced significant increases, indicating a growing public understanding of the

importance of complying with village administrative rules and procedures. Overall, the graph indicates that the legal outreach program successfully increased the community's understanding and awareness of legal matters across various aspects of village social and administrative life.

Discussion

The results of the community service program demonstrate that legal outreach activities significantly improved the legal literacy of village communities, particularly in understanding the rights and obligations of citizens (Naomi & Samadder, 2012). This improvement suggests that the community's low legal awareness is more due to limited access to legal education than to a lack of capacity to understand legal regulations (Goodwin & Maru, 2017). Legal outreach, delivered in simple language and using case studies relevant to everyday life, has proven effective in helping communities understand the function of law as a tool for protecting and regulating social life. This finding aligns with the view that the effectiveness of the law is strongly influenced by a community's legal culture, which is formed through education and social experience (Friedman, 1975).

In addition to improving cognitive aspects, outreach activities also demonstrated a shift in community attitudes toward the importance of legal conflict resolution through deliberation. Case discussions conducted during the program provided a space for communities to understand the various legal consequences of common social conflicts, such as land disputes and family conflicts (Maulana et al., 2025). This change demonstrates that legal education can encourage communities to prefer constructive conflict resolution mechanisms over informal ones that have the potential to lead to prolonged conflict. These conditions support the concept of responsive law, which positions the law as a means of resolving social problems in a fair and participatory manner (Nonet & Selznick, 1978).

Further discussion shows that a participatory approach is a crucial factor in the program's success. Communities do not merely passively receive information but actively participate in discussions and share experiences regarding the legal issues they face (Lestari et al., 2025). This approach allows participants to understand the material contextually, according to the village's social conditions. The success of this participatory approach strengthens the argument that developing a legal culture must be carried out through a community empowerment process involving the active participation of residents as subjects of development (Soekanto, 2007).

The program also had a positive impact on the quality of village administrative services due to increased public awareness of the importance of orderly administration and compliance with legal procedures. Village officials reported increased citizen participation in processing population documents and resolving administrative issues through official procedures (Mappisabbi et al., 2023). This situation indicates that increasing community legal literacy contributes to strengthening more transparent and accountable village governance, as emphasized in the rule of law concept, which places law as the foundation of effective governance (Bedner, 2010). Overall, the discussion of the program's results indicates that local needs-based legal outreach is an effective strategy for

increasing legal awareness in rural communities. The success of this program underscores the importance of sustainable legal education activities through collaboration between universities, village governments, and communities to build a strong legal culture. With increased legal literacy, communities are expected to be able to create a legally orderly social life and support sustainable village development (Friedman, 1975; Soekanto, 2007).

Conclusion

Community service programs that provide information on the rights and obligations of citizens have proven effective in improving legal literacy in rural communities, both in terms of understanding and awareness of the law in social life and village government administration. These outreach activities, implemented using a participatory and contextual approach, have been able to increase public understanding of the rights and obligations of citizens, strengthen awareness of the importance of legal compliance, and encourage active community participation in creating a social life that is orderly and legally sound. Furthermore, these programs have had a positive impact on improving orderly village administration and resolving conflicts more constructively. Thus, local needs-based legal outreach programs can be an effective and sustainable model for community empowerment in supporting harmonious village development oriented toward law-based social governance.

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