Legal Counseling on Public Policy Reform and the Strengthening of Legal Culture among Senior High School Students

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Abstract

Public policy reform and the strengthening of legal culture are essential to realizing the ideals of a rule-of-law state as mandated by UUD NRI 1945. However, the low level of students' understanding of public policy and law indicates a participatory capacity gap and a weak legal awareness among young people. This issue is increasingly relevant due to the persistence of various legal and disciplinary violations among students, such as bullying, student brawls, violations of school rules, and limited meaningful participation in public policy processes. This community service activity aims to improve students' literacy on public policy reform, instill legal values and legal culture, develop meaningful participation, and encourage law-abiding behavior in school and community life. The method used was participatory legal counseling conducted at SMK Advent Batam through several stages, including observation, coordination, pre-test, material presentation, interactive discussion, post-test, and evaluation. The findings show a significant improvement in students' understanding, particularly in defining public policy reform, identifying the stages of the policy cycle, explaining the levels of legal culture, and describing the reciprocal relationship between participatory public policy and a strong legal culture. This study is significant as it offers a contextual, inclusive, and applicable legal education model for secondary school students in developing a legally aware, critical, and participatory young generation.

Keywords: Public Policy Reform, Legal Culture, Legal Education

INTRODUCTION

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Legal education on public policy reform constitutes an educational activity aimed at providing the public with an understanding of the process of changing and improving government policies so that they become more responsive, accountable, and oriented toward the public interest (Shoimuna, 2024). In this context, public policy reform functions as a fundamental transformation in the manner in which the state responds to citizens' problems through effective and equitable policy instruments (Herdiana, 2025). Meanwhile, the strengthening of legal culture refers to a systematic effort to instill values, attitudes, and law-abiding behavior in social life, covering legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior (Suardi et al., 2022). These two concepts are closely interrelated, as a strong legal culture provides the social foundation for the success of public policy reform; legally aware communities are more likely to supervise and participate actively in public policy processes (Ismail et al., 2025). An open and inclusive approach in policy-making enables various community groups to participate and convey their aspirations, thereby increasing acceptance of the resulting policies and producing more effective implementation and enforcement. (Shahrullah, Situmeang, & Nababan, 2023)

The phenomenon of low understanding among young people of public policy and law in Indonesia has become an increasingly prominent issue in various scholarly studies. Research identifies three significant gaps in participatory capacity among Indonesian youth: the knowing-understanding gap, the understanding-doing gap, and the access-influence gap. This finding is reinforced by (Putri, 2025), which highlights that education on public policy and law remains confined to formal academic settings, while participation and learning access for non-academic youth in legislative and public policy processes remain very limited. Several legal education programs at the senior high school level, such as basic legal education at SMA Negeri 38 Jakarta, have shown improvements in students' understanding of fundamental legal principles and awareness of compliance with norms (Jatna et al., 2025). However, the scope of these programs remains limited to a general introduction to the legal system and has not specifically addressed public policy reform or mechanisms for citizen participation in policy processes.

Meanwhile, the direction of policy reform at the national level continues to develop significantly. The Government of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Law, has established the 2025-2029 bureaucratic reform roadmap, which emphasizes the importance of adaptive, principle-based regulations oriented toward improving the quality of public services and reducing administrative burdens (Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional,

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2026). Public administrative reform is also directed not merely at improving organizational structures, but at transforming bureaucratic culture and strengthening the relationship between the state and society. Efforts to strengthen transparency and prevent maladministration also continue to be pursued, as reflected in the synergy between the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia and the public (Kiswara, 2025). On the other hand, public participation in the formation of legislation still faces structural challenges, including normative gaps in the Law on the Formation of Legislation that restrict the space for meaningful participation among young people (Wulandari et al., 2025). This condition indicates an urgent need to bridge the gap between policy reform at the structural level and the understanding and participation capacity of young people at the grassroots community level.

The most fundamental legal issue in this context is the gap between the ideal condition of legal culture expected by the legal order and the empirical reality among students. Ideally, every citizen, including senior high school students, should possess adequate legal awareness as a foundation for meaningful participation in national and civic life, as mandated by Undang-Undang Nomor 40 Tahun 2009 concerning Youth, which affirms the position of youth as strategic actors in national development and agents of social control in the formulation of public policy (Putri, 2025). However, field realities indicate the opposite. Data from the Jakarta Education Office recorded that throughout 2023, 492 students violated rules due to brawls, bullying, sexual violence, and the abuse of drugs and alcoholic beverages (Dany, 2024). The Indonesian Teachers' Union Federation (FSGI) also reported 23 cases of bullying in schools in 2023, of which 13.5% occurred at the senior high school level (Rosa, 2024). Furthermore, research in Bima City showed a surge in traffic violations among students from 105 cases in 2023 to 220 cases in 2024, reflecting a serious crisis of legal awareness among the younger generation (Irawansah et al., 2025).

This gap is exacerbated by the weakness of inclusive and structured instruments for public policy and legal education for students. Research by (Shahrullah, Situmeang, Seroja, et al., 2023) found that low public legal awareness may be influenced by the tendency of certain parties to prioritize personal or group interests over collective interests, thereby reducing concern for the law. In addition, research by (Putri, 2025) emphasizes the existence of a crisis of meaningful participation in Indonesian democracy, where procedural participation spaces tend to be pseudo-participatory because the public is involved symbolically without adequate understanding, access to information, or critical capacity. A 2025 survey

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conducted by Yayasan Partisipan Muda revealed that 73.9% of young respondents were afraid to express opinions in public spaces, while 42% considered that the government had not adequately protected citizens' civil rights (Fajar & Utama, 2025). A repressive approach to juvenile delinquency is also considered insufficient to address the root causes of the problem, given that students' low legal awareness is influenced by multidimensional factors such as limited legal understanding, weak family and school supervision, and the negative effects of social media (Irawansah et al., 2025). Ironically, although the Ministry of Law has routinely implemented the Legal Reform Index (IRH) assessment program since 2022 as a tool for measuring the implementation of legal reform in every institution and regional government, the results of this program have not optimally reached the secondary education level and have not been integrated into the civic education curriculum at the senior high school level (Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional, 2026).

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between legal education, public participation, and the strengthening of legal awareness among students. (Jatna et al., 2025), in their study of basic legal education at SMA Negeri 38 Jakarta, found that legal education programs using interactive lectures and simple case analysis contributed to strengthening students' legal literacy and supported the development of a more rule-compliant school culture. Second, (Cahayo et al., 2025), through a PkM legal education program on bullying at SMAN 32 Jakarta, demonstrated that socialization and interactive discussion can increase students' awareness of the dangers of bullying and its prevention. Third, (Putri et al., 2025), through a study involving 567 Indonesian youth respondents, identified three structural gaps in participatory capacity that are reproduced through the disjunction between learning processes and the regulatory design of public participation. Fourth, (Wulandari et al., 2025) highlighted normative gaps in the Law on the Formation of Legislation that restrict meaningful participation among young people and proposed the establishment of Public Voice Collection Agency (BPSR) as an institutional solution. Fifth, (Siregar, 2026), in a legal education activity at Al-Ihsan Mulia Junior High School Medan, proved that educational approaches through direct sessions, quizzes, and group discussions effectively improved students' legal awareness and fostered responsible civic character. These five studies consistently show that educational interventions within the school environment have a positive impact on improving students' legal literacy and legal awareness; however, none has specifically integrated the issue of public policy reform into legal education programs for senior high school students.

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Based on the foregoing, the PkM activity entitled "Legal Counseling on Public Policy Reform and the Strengthening of Legal Culture among Senior High School Students" is presented as a significant contribution to addressing the two identified gaps. First, substantively, this activity introduces the issue of public policy reform, which has not yet been integrated into conventional legal education programs at the senior high school level, thereby broadening students' insights into the dynamics of public policy and their strategic role as citizens. Second, methodologically, this activity adopts a participatory approach that positions students as active actors in identifying policy issues in their surrounding environment and formulating aspirations constructively. In addition, the study conducted by (Shahrullah, Situmeang, & Nababan, 2023) shows that direct legal education activities can improve public understanding of legal rights and encourage the formation of better legal awareness. In line with this, (Disemadi et al., 2023) affirms that legal education can be understood as a means of socializing legal issues and empowering communities by providing an understanding of the legal aspects applicable in society. This view strengthens the relevance of the PkM activity as an educational instrument to improve legal understanding in society, including students as part of the younger generation. Accordingly, this activity is expected to serve as a pilot model for developing a more inclusive curriculum on public policy and legal literacy at the secondary education level, while bridging the gap between the direction of national policy reform and the participatory capacity of young people.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This activity was conducted at SMK Advent Batam, located at Jalan Teratai No. 1 Blok V, Lubuk Baja, Batam City, Riau Islands. The core activity, in the form of legal education, had been prepared since March 2026 and was planned to be implemented in April 2026, while the completion of the report and publication stage was scheduled for May 2026. The implementation method used was legal counseling integrated with a participatory approach and interactive discussion.

The activity began with observation and data collection at SMK Advent Batam through a direct visit to obtain primary data on school conditions and secondary data, which then served as the basis for preparing the legal education materials and evaluation instruments tailored to the students' level of understanding. This stage also included coordination with the school to determine the schedule, participant composition, facilities and infrastructure, and permits, and concluded with the finalization of materials, instruments, and the technical implementation plan. The core

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implementation began with a pre-test, followed by the delivery of materials using PowerPoint and a concise module, a participatory interactive discussion that positioned students as active subjects in identifying public policy problems around them, and an evaluation and reflection session through a post-test, discussion of changes in understanding, and students' commitment to becoming agents of legal culture transformation. The entire series of activities was documented through photographs, audio recordings, and short videos.

The final stage focused on comprehensive evaluation, including quantitative analysis of pre-test and post-test results to measure improvements in understanding, as well as qualitative evaluation based on observations and oral feedback from participants and the school. The results became the basis for preparing a factual report. The outputs of the activity consisted of a PkM report and article, a short video production, an infographic, a book chapter, and legal education materials.

IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

Public Policy Reform and Legal Culture Strengthening

Public policy reform and the strengthening of legal culture constitute constitutional imperatives for realizing the ideal of a rule-of-law state (*rechtsstaat*), as mandated in Article 1 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NRI 1945), which expressly states that Indonesia is a state based on law. This constitutional ideal cannot be realized without fundamental changes in governance and in society's perspective toward law. Furthermore, Article 27 paragraph (1) of UUD NRI 1945 guarantees the equal position of every citizen before the law and government, serving as the foundation for equitable public policy reform and the strengthening of a legal culture that upholds equality. Public policy reform and the strengthening of legal culture in the Indonesian context cannot be separated from the mandate of total reform following the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1998, which demanded a comprehensive overhaul of the legal system in terms of substance, structure, and national legal culture.

Public policy reform is understood as a process of restructuring the legal system that includes changes in legal substance, namely legislation; legal structure, namely institutions and law enforcement officials; and legal culture as a whole, so that they align with the principles of a democratic rule-of-law state (Bagus, 2022). This definition emphasizes that public policy reform does not merely replace old regulations with new ones, but rather entails fundamental changes to the entire national legal system. Lawrence M. Friedman, through his legal system theory, divides the legal system into

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three main components: legal substance, legal structure, and legal culture, all of which must be reformed simultaneously (Putra et al., 2025).

Concrete examples of public policy reform in Indonesia include the enactment of Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation, which was later replaced by Law Number 6 of 2023, aimed at simplifying overlapping regulations that hinder investment. In addition, the Health Social Security Administering Body (BPJS Kesehatan) program is also one form of public policy reform in the health sector that facilitates public access to health services (Samodra & Wirantari, 2024). Public policy reform can also be seen in the establishment of new state institutions such as the Judicial Commission and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) as responses to the weakness of the judiciary and the high prevalence of corruption in Indonesia. A study comparing the design of government organs in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam shows that the success of regulatory reform is highly dependent on the existence of specialized institutions with full authority to ensure the legislative drafting process (Eka Dewi & Sjarif, 2024).

Figure 1. Materials for the Presentation



Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

The urgency of public policy reform in Indonesia is undeniable, considering that its primary objective is to create governance that is effective, transparent, accountable, and responsive to public needs (Hanafi, 2023). More specifically, public policy reform aims to eliminate overlapping regulations that obstruct development, improve the quality of public services, strengthen the rule of law, prevent corruption, collusion, and nepotism, and build public trust in the government and legal system (Mozin et al., 2025). In line with this, (Tan, 2022) emphasizes that the government plays an important role in providing quality public services,

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because the effectiveness of governance is largely determined by the quality of public service implementation received by the community. Thus, public policy reform is oriented not only toward regulatory change but also toward improving public service quality as a concrete manifestation of the state's presence in meeting public needs. Governance transformation must also be carried out strategically, with emphasis on strengthening the competence of civil servants and digitalizing bureaucracy (Adila & Mahendra Putri, 2024).

The principles of sound public policy from the perspective of state administrative law include legal certainty, openness, public participation, accountability, and proportionality. In line with these principles, responsive legal reform requires flexibility, openness, transparency, justice based on public interest, and community participation in the policy-making process (Antony et al., 2025). Therefore, public policy cannot be formulated merely on the basis of formal procedures; it must also be able to adapt to public needs, open spaces for public aspirations, and ensure that every policy produced is genuinely oriented toward the public interest. The general principles of good governance (AAUPB), as regulated in Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration (UUAP), serve as moral guidelines that must be applied in every public policy produced. The consistent and planned application of good governance principles is a fundamental element in realizing clean and effective government, free from corruption, with transparent financial flows, and without collusion and nepotism. The existence of AAUPB after the enactment of UUAP provides legal certainty that every governmental action must be based on sound principles and provide benefits to society (Utama, 2024).

The stages of public policy reform refer to the policy cycle model, consisting of: problem identification, namely the stage of recognizing and formulating public problems that require government intervention; policy agenda setting, namely the stage of determining priority problems to be addressed; policy formulation, namely the process of designing alternative solutions in the form of draft legislation; policy legitimation, which includes the process of deliberation and enactment by the legislative body; policy implementation, namely the stage of carrying out policies in the field by government apparatus; and policy evaluation, which is the assessment of policy effectiveness to determine whether a policy needs to be renewed, replaced, or terminated (Wahyuni, 2022). These six stages must be implemented sequentially and continuously by involving meaningful public participation. The success of public policy reform depends greatly on the quality of implementation at each stage of the policy cycle (Nunung et al., 2025).

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The strengthening of legal culture is defined as a systematic and continuous effort to transform the attitudes, values, behavior, and orientation of society toward law so that law is no longer viewed as a threat or burden, but as a necessity and an instrument for achieving social justice. A strong legal culture serves as an important foundation for supporting a fair and just rule of law, because legal culture reflects the attitudes, values, and behavior of society in obeying and respecting the law (Mukaromah et al., 2025). According to Friedman's theory, legal culture is the most crucial element in the legal system because it bridges legal substance and legal structure with societal behavior (Kore, 2025). Research by (Febriyani et al., 2025) demonstrates that legal education connecting legal theory with students' everyday practices can increase legal awareness while strengthening legal culture within schools and society. Without a supportive legal culture, even sound legal substance will not be effectively implemented in society. Legal pluralism, which includes Western, customary, religious, and national legal systems, poses significant challenges in creating an integrated national legal culture (Hadi, 2025).

The urgency of strengthening legal culture in Indonesia is unquestionable, given various phenomena such as disparities in law enforcement, the lack of exemplary conduct among law enforcement officials, and the high level of societal permissiveness toward legal violations. A strong legal culture can function as effective social control in preventing legal violations and increasing public trust in the law. Conversely, a weak legal culture perpetuates deviant practices such as corruption, bribery, vigilantism, and low awareness of paying taxes or complying with traffic regulations. Legal culture also plays an important role in shaping public perceptions and orientations toward the law, including legal legitimacy and social practices that reflect compliance with legal norms. In the current digital era, changes in legal culture occur increasingly rapidly due to the influence of social media and information technology, which transform public attitudes and expectations toward law enforcement, particularly in terms of transparency and accountability (Efrizon et al., 2025). The development of digital technology has generated various new forms of legal violations that require increased public legal awareness. Research by (Weley et al., 2024) concludes that legal protection in the digital era depends not only on adequate regulation, but also on the level of public understanding of legal rights in digital spaces.

The levels of legal culture from the perspective of sociology of law, according to Prof. Soerjono Soekanto, can be divided into four levels: legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior (Katjong & Katjong, 2024). Indicators of weak legal culture include low public legal

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awareness, marked by ignorance of legal rights and obligations; the prevalence of corruption, collusion, and nepotism within bureaucracy and law enforcement; the lack of exemplary conduct among law enforcement officials in obeying the law; widespread judicial corruption and case brokerage within the judicial system; a high level of legal immunity for perpetrators of crimes who possess power or wealth; and the strengthening of vigilantism (*eigenrichting*) when society loses trust in the formal justice system (I Gede & I Wayan, 2024). Studies on legal culture in Indonesia also find that corruption is the clearest illustration of weak rule of law and legal culture in Indonesia, where corrupt practices continue to recur because there is no significant deterrent effect (Kore, 2025).

The relationship between public policy reform and the strengthening of legal culture is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Public policy reform in the areas of legal substance and legal structure will not achieve optimal results if it is not supported by adequate changes in legal culture. Conversely, strengthening legal culture also requires public policy that is responsive to local values and community needs. In other words, public policy reform functions as an enabler of changes in legal culture, while a strong legal culture functions as a driver of successful public policy reform. The use of traditional values and local wisdom can be an effective instrument for building closeness between government and society while improving bureaucratic effectiveness (Subarsyah et al., 2025). In addition, innovation in public service models based on local cultural practices has been proven to improve accountability, participation, and legal legitimacy in society (Ngaisah et al., 2025).

Figure 2. Materials for the Presentation



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The benefits of legal education on public policy reform and strengthening legal culture for students as the nation's future generation are strategic and multidimensional. First, legal education improves students' legal literacy so that they understand their rights and obligations as citizens. Second, legal education instills the values of integrity, honesty, and justice from an early age, thereby shaping the character of future generations who respect the supremacy of law. Third, students who gain an understanding of public policy reform can become agents of change in their environment, whether at school, in their families, or in the surrounding community. Fourth, by understanding the importance of a strong legal culture, students can avoid deviant behaviors such as bullying, brawls, drug use, and traffic violations. Fifth, legal education builds awareness that law is not merely a punitive instrument, but an instrument for protecting human rights and creating social justice. A study conducted (Gaol & Simamora, 2025) on the role of legal education in building legal culture in village communities shows that the Law-Aware Village program initiated by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia has proven effective in increasing public legal awareness, particularly when implemented continuously and involving active citizen participation. Therefore, legal education on public policy reform and strengthening legal culture for students should become a national priority program in efforts to establish Indonesia as a modern, democratic, and just rule-of-law state.

Implementation of Legal Counseling

The initial stage of implementing this community service activity took place from February to April 2026, focusing on observation and data collection at SMK Advent Batam. Observation was conducted to identify the characteristics of the students and the school environment relevant to the legal education topic. The results of this observation became the basis for determining the appropriate outreach approach, namely a communicative-participatory approach that adjusted the language and case examples to the context of vocational students, so that materials on public policy reform and strengthening legal culture could be received contextually.

The preparation stage concluded with intensive coordination with SMK Advent Batam. Discussions were held with school representatives to determine the event agenda, time, and venue. Based on mutual agreement, the legal education activity was scheduled for Friday, May 8, 2026, from 12:15 to 13:20 Western Indonesian Time (WIB) in class XI AK1. This coordination also ensured technical readiness, including the projector, sound system, and banner placement, and aligned perceptions regarding the

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pre-test and post-test mechanisms to be applied without disrupting the students' learning rhythm.

The activity on the appointed day proceeded smoothly and on time. The legal education session opened with self-introductions and a brief introduction to the background and objectives of the activity. After establishing a friendly atmosphere, the written pre-test was immediately administered. Students were given the same questions to explore their initial understanding of public policy reform, the meaning of strengthening legal culture, and the relationship between the two. Of the 15 students who attended, most showed limited initial understanding; the term "legal culture" was still considered unfamiliar, while "public policy reform" was narrowly associated only with demonstrations or changes to laws without adequate conceptual understanding.

During the core session, the material was delivered using prepared PowerPoint slides. The first part examined public policy reform through the policy cycle approach, beginning with agenda setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation, accompanied by actual case examples close to students' lives, such as the provision of BPJS Kesehatan. The second part discussed the strengthening of legal culture as awareness and habitual law-abiding behavior that grows from the internalization of values, rather than mere fear of sanctions. The explanation also emphasized a two-way causal relationship: participatory and transparent public policy encourages citizens' trust and thereby strengthens legal culture, while a strong legal culture is a prerequisite for sustainable policy reform.

Figure 3. Material Introduction Session



Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

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After the delivery of the material, a question-and-answer session was opened and used by students to clarify matters they had not yet understood, such as the role of students in overseeing public policy and how to build a legal culture in the school environment. After the discussion, a written post-test was administered using questions similar to those in the pre-test. As a form of appreciation for active participation, souvenirs were given to students who took the initiative to ask questions or provide answers during the question-and-answer session. The activity concluded at 13:20 with the delivery of conclusions and a message encouraging students to continue sharpening their sensitivity to public policy issues while becoming pioneers of legal culture in their respective communities.

Figure 4. Post-Test Session



Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

After the implementation of the activity, an evaluation was conducted by comparing the results of the written pre-test and post-test completed by the 15 participating students. The evaluation showed a meaningful improvement in understanding, reflected in students' ability to provide answers with a higher level of accuracy in the post-test than in the pre-test. At the pre-test stage, most students were not yet able to define precisely the meaning and types of public policy and the urgency of its reform, the concept of strengthening legal culture, and tended not to recognize the relationship between the two. Conversely, in the post-test, the students were not only able to explain the two main concepts more accurately, but also able to describe the reciprocal relationship between participatory public policy reform and the strengthening of legal culture with more structured arguments. This improvement indicates that contextual delivery of materials and interactive question-and-answer sessions successfully strengthened students' initial knowledge while forming a more comprehensive understanding of the legal education topic.

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CONCLUSION

The PkM activity entitled "Legal Counseling on Public Policy Reform and the Strengthening of Legal Culture among Senior High School Students" at SMK Advent Batam successfully achieved all of its objectives effectively. This achievement was reflected in the improvement of students' literacy regarding public policy reform and national regulations, as indicated by the increase in post-test results and their ability to define key concepts, explain the policy cycle, and provide examples such as BPJS Kesehatan and the UU Cipta Kerja. The activity also fostered legal culture by transforming students' understanding from unfamiliarity into the ability to explain the levels of legal culture and the importance of internalizing legal values. Furthermore, it developed the capacity for meaningful participation through students' enthusiasm in critical discussions and encouraged changes in law-abiding attitudes, as reflected in their commitment to becoming agents of change and complying with school rules. Thus, the participatory-interactive approach proved capable of bridging the gap in understanding. Based on these findings, future implementation teams are advised to extend the duration of the activity to 3-4 hours for deeper material exploration and simulation, and to supplement the evaluation with a follow-up survey two weeks after the activity to measure retention. SMK Advent Batam is encouraged to integrate the material into an extracurricular program such as a "Legal Awareness Club" to ensure continuous development. The Faculty of Law and LPPM of Universitas Internasional Batam are advised to expand the scale of the program to several schools and develop teacher training modules to create a multiplier effect. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies on legal education methods, including interactive lectures, educational games, trial simulations, and policy debates, in order to formulate the most adaptive model for young people.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Antony: Conceptualization, methodology, writing original draft, and project administration. Rufinus Hotmaulana Hutauruk: Supervision, validation, and review. Ampuan Situmeang: Supervision, validation, and review. Evellyn Leticia: Data collection, documentation, and supporting analysis.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

Generative AI tools were used solely to support language refinement, grammar checking, and manuscript clarity. All academic content, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were reviewed and verified by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the final manuscript.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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