Legal Learning Strategies for Early Childhood: A Conceptual Approach to Instilling Legal Values and Awareness from an Early Age

Fitri[1*], Bambang Afriadi[1], Siti Humulhaer[1]
Universitas Islam Syekh-Yusuf[1]
Correspondence: fitri@unis.ac.id

ABSTRACT
Legal education for early childhood plays an important role in shaping legal awareness from an early age, which contributes to compliance with social rules in the future. This study uses a normative research method with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify and synthesise effective methods for teaching legal concepts in early childhood. This study analyses various previous studies that highlight Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky's theory of social learning, and Gardner's concept of multiple intelligence in the context of legal learning. Several studies show that experiential learning-based approaches, gamification, mini-court simulations, and legal narratives are able to increase children's understanding of legal and social norms. A character-based approach and moral values, as affirmed by Lickona, have been proven to shape children's legal awareness more deeply. By compiling a conceptual synthesis of various pedagogical approaches, this study provides practical recommendations for educators and policymakers in designing more effective legal learning strategies for early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

Legal education for early childhood is an important aspect of forming legal awareness from an early age, which ultimately contributes to the creation of a more law-abiding society in the future. Cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1999) shows that early childhood is in the pre-operational stage, where children begin to understand the basic concepts of norms and rules through concrete experiences. (Vygotsky, 1980) emphasising that social interaction plays a key role in children's learning, including in understanding legal norms. The study (Berk, 2018) shows that children who are guided through interaction with adults tend to understand the concept of social rules better. In addition, social learning theory (Bandura, 2003) emphasises that children can internalise legal behaviour through observation of authority figures who provide examples of compliance with rules. Recent research by (Walsh et al., 2023); (Alotaibi, 2024) showed that children who were taught legal ethics through educational games showed an increased understanding of the rules and their consequences. Meanwhile, the approach to character education (Lickona, 1992) underlines the importance of integrating legal values in the early childhood education curriculum to form a more legally aware attitude from an early age.

The method of learning law for early childhood needs to consider their developmental characteristics, as affirmed by the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011), which states that children have various ways of understanding information, including through visual, kinesthetic, and verbal approaches. The concept of constructivism (Bruner, J., 1960) emphasises that children can easily understand the law if it is given in a context relevant to their lives. Studies (Lee Jia Yee et al., 2022); (Lundy et al., 2024) show that children understand the rule of law more quickly when given in the form of stories or role-playing that involve hands-on experience. Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) also emphasises the importance of the environment in shaping children's understanding of law, where the involvement of parents, teachers, and the community is very influential. Meanwhile, the experiential

learning approach (Kolb, 2014) showed that children more easily understood the law when they experienced firsthand the consequences of breaking the rules in a safe and controlled simulation. Recent research results from (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2023); (Marta Licardo et al., 2023) It supports that the experience-based method is more effective in instilling legal understanding compared to the traditional lecture method.

The teaching of law for early childhood must also pay attention to the moral and ethical aspects that underlie the regulations in society. Theory of moral development (Lapsley & Yeager, 2013); (Cheng, 2020); (Kohlberg, 1981) shows that children are in the early stages of moral understanding, where they tend to obey the rules because of rewards and punishments. Based on the theory of self-regulation (Deborah L. Butler et al., 2013); (Xiaoshu Xu et al., 2024), children can learn to understand the rule of law better if they are taught how to control their behaviour in social situations. Research by Peterson et al. (2021) shows that ethical discussion-based learning programs can improve children's understanding of the reasoning behind the rule of law. The concept of moral education, according to (Larry Nucci, 2008) states that children need to be given an understanding of the difference between moral rules and social rules in order to develop more critical thinking about the law. In addition, cognitive and social theory (Schunk, 2012) states that children will understand the law better if they are given clear feedback about their behaviour. A recent study by (Inha, 2025); (Treiman et al., 2017) revealed that value-based legal learning can shape the character of children who are more concerned about justice and the rights of others.

Taking into account the various theories and research results above, an effective approach to teaching law in early childhood must be interactive, experience-based, and consider aspects of children's moral and cognitive development. Based on these various theories and research, this article aims to explore effective strategies in teaching law to early childhood with an approach that is appropriate to their developmental stages. By implementing learning methods that are interactive, experiential-based, and involve their social environment, it is hoped that children can internalise legal values from an early age and build a strong legal awareness for the future.

METHOD
This study uses a normative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to analyse effective methods of teaching legal concepts in early childhood. (Babar & Zhang, 2009); (Babar & Zhang, 2009); (Tancred et al., 2018) state that SLRs allow for the systematic identification and synthesis of various previous studies, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding. This research not only collects relevant research but also evaluates its quality and contribution to the field of study (Grant & Booth, 2009); (Grant & Booth, 2009).

In the context of legal education for early childhood, this approach is important to understand how the theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1999) and social learning theory (Vygotsky, 1980); (Mello & Gobara, 2013) can be implemented in teaching practice. A recent study by (Tanaka & Matsuzoe, 2012) showed that game-based methods and social interaction were effective in introducing the rule of law to children, while research (Ravaghi et al., 2023); (McCarthy & Zald, 1977); (McGovern et al., 2023) found that a legal narrative-based approach helps improve children's understanding of social norms. Inclusion criteria include research published in the last

International Journal of Business, Law, and Education
Publisher: IJBLE Scientific Publications Community Inc.
E-ISSN : 2747-138X

Volume 5, Number 2, 2024
https://ijble.com/index.php/journal/index

10 years, which discusses legal learning methods for early childhood and contains a pedagogical approach based on child development theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Importance of Legal Education for Early Childhood

Early knowledge of the law is very important in shaping children's social and moral awareness. The theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) states that children learn about social rules and norms through progressive stages of moral development. Next (Piaget, 1999) emphasises that children's understanding of the rule of law develops from heterogenous to autonomous as they age. (Vygotsky, 1980) Social learning theory emphasises that interaction with adults and the surrounding environment greatly affects children's cognitive and moral development. (Lickona, 1992) emphasising that moral value-based character education is the basis for building legal awareness in children from an early age. According to (Bruner, J., 1960), children learn through the gradual construction of knowledge, so the method of teaching law must be designed according to their cognitive development.

Meanwhile, the theory of developmental ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emphasises that the social environment, such as family and school, plays an important role in instilling legal awareness in children. Research (Larry Nucci, 2008) found that children can understand the difference between moral rules and conventional rules if given real experience. A study by Peterson et al. (2021) shows that simulation-based methods are effective in teaching children about the rule of law in everyday life. In addition, research (Smith et al., 2006); (Xezonaki, 2022); (Lampropoulos et al., 2022) revealed that the use of digital media can increase the effectiveness of legal education for early childhood.

2. A Contextual Approach to Legal Learning for Early Childhood

Legal learning strategies for early childhood must be adapted to the context of their cognitive and social development. According to the theory of constructivist learning (Piaget, 1999), children build their understanding through hands-on experience so that the play-based learning approach becomes effective in introducing legal concepts. Active learning theory (Dewey & Sidney, 2008) also supports this method by emphasising the importance of children's involvement in the learning process. (Kolb, 2014) In the experiential learning model, it is revealed that children understand concepts better through activities that involve direct interaction with rules and laws. Social development theory (Vygotsky, 1980) showed that children learn more effectively through interaction with adults and peers in a supportive social environment. (Gardner, 2011) The theory of multiple intelligences emphasises that every child has a different learning style, so multi-method approaches such as storytelling, role-playing, and legal simulations can help them understand the rule of law better. Research by (Rahiem, 2021); (Abdel Majid & Al-Noaimi, 2024); (Catalano & Catalano, 2022) found that story-based legal narratives can improve children's understanding of social norms. A study by (Maria Hatzigianni et al., 2023); (Rachel Barr et al., 2024) shows that the use of digital technology, such as educational applications, helps children interactively recognise legal concepts.

3. Effective Strategies in Instilling Legal Values and Awareness Early

An early childhood law teaching strategy should include a variety of approaches that can improve their understanding of the rules and consequences of the law. According to the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), children learn better if they experience the rule of law firsthand through simulations or role-playing. (Lickona,

1992) emphasising the importance of character education in shaping values and legal awareness in children. (Bruner, J., 1960) stated that children learn more effectively through a scaffolding-based approach, where they are provided with gradual support in understanding complex legal concepts. The theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) Demonstrates that children can understand the concept of justice and rules if given concrete experiences that are relevant to their lives. Study by (Smith et al., 2006) (Larry Nucci, 2008) found that legal education associated with children's real experiences was more effective in instilling legal awareness than a theory-only approach. Research (Smith et al., 2006); (Xezonaki, 2022); (Lampropoulos et al., 2022) shows that gamification-based methods improve children's understanding of the rule of law in a fun way. A study by (Olga Chernikova et al., 2020); (Gul Pinar & Sibel Peksoy, 2016); (Andreta Slavinska et al., 2024) found that mini-court simulations can help children understand the legal consequences and the importance of justice.

Discussion

The results of the study show that legal education for early childhood plays an important role in shaping their social and moral awareness. Based on the theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) and the theory of constructivism (Piaget, 1999), children go through a gradual process of understanding the concept of rules and legal norms. The application of experiential legal learning strategies, as suggested by (Vygotsky, 1980) in social learning theory, helps children internalise legal values more effectively. In addition, research by; (Xezonaki, 2022); (Lampropoulos et al., 2022) shows that simulation-based learning methods and the use of digital media can increase the effectiveness of teaching law in early childhood. Thus, the combination of cognitive and social development theories with innovative learning strategies can be a solution to building legal awareness from an early age.

The contextual approach to learning law for early childhood also needs to consider the differences in their learning styles. As stated in the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011), every child has a different way of learning, so methods such as storytelling, role-playing, and simulation can be used simultaneously to improve their understanding of the rule of law. Active learning theory (Dewey & Sidney, 2008) and experiential learning models (Kolb, 2014) emphasise that children are more likely to understand legal concepts when they are directly involved in the learning process. A study by Maria (Maria Hatzigianni et al., 2023); (Rachel Barr et al., 2024) also supports the idea that digital technologies, such as educational applications, can be an effective tool in introducing children to legal concepts in a more interactive way. Therefore, the approach to learning law must consider a variety of methods that are adjusted to the child's cognitive development stage so that learning is more effective and interesting.

In instilling legal values and awareness from an early age, various learning strategies must be applied systematically and continuously. Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014) emphasises that children need to experience the rule of law firsthand in order to understand its meaning better. Character education, affirmed by (Lickona, 1992), also plays a role in shaping legal awareness because children learn to understand moral and ethical concepts through social interaction. Research by (Xezonaki, 2022) and Lampropoulos et al. (2022) showed that gamification methods are able to improve children's understanding of the law in a fun way. In addition, a study by (Olga Chernikova et al., 2020); (Gul Pinar & Sibel Peksoy, 2016) revealed that mini-court simulations can help children understand the legal consequences as well as the importance of the value of justice in daily life. Thus, law learning strategies

International Journal of Business, Law, and Education
Publisher: IJBLE Scientific Publications Community Inc.

Volume 5, Number 2, 2024
https://ijble.com/index.php/journal/index

that are interactive, experience-based, and incorporate technology can be an effective approach to instilling legal awareness in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

Legal education for early childhood is a strategic step in forming social and moral awareness from an early age. Based on various developmental theories, such as moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), constructivism (Piaget, 1999), and social learning (Mello & Gobara, 2013)), children learn to understand the rule of law through interaction with the environment and hands-on experience. Research shows that experiential learning approaches, such as simulations and role-playing, are more effective in instilling an understanding of the law than conventional methods.

A contextual approach to legal learning is also an important factor in the effectiveness of teaching. The theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011) emphasises that every child has a different learning style, so multi-strategy methods, such as storytelling, gamification, and digital technology, need to be applied to optimise their understanding of the law. The results of the study show that the use of digital technology and mini-court simulations can increase children's involvement in understanding the value and consequences of the law in daily life.

Thus, effective legal learning strategies for early childhood must be experience-based, adjust to the stage of cognitive development, and use technology and interactive methods to increase children's absorption of legal values. The implementation of legal education from an early age not only builds strong legal awareness but also contributes to the formation of children's character as responsible individuals in society.

References

Abdel Majid & Al-Noaimi. (2024). The Power of Storytelling in Early Education. https://www.unicef.org/jordan/stories/power-storytelling-early-education

Alotaibi, M. S. (2024). Game-based learning in early childhood education: A systematic review and meta-analysis. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1307881

Andreta Slavinska, Karina Palkova, Evita Grigoroviča, Edgars Edelmers, & Aigars Pētersons. (2024). Narrative Review of Legal Aspects in the Integration of Simulation-Based Education into Medical and Healthcare Curricula. https://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/13/2/15

Babar, M. A., & Zhang, H. (2009). Systematic literature reviews in software engineering: Preliminary results from interviews with researchers. Proceedings of the 2009 3rd International Symposium on Empirical Software Engineering and Measurement, 346–355. https://doi.org/10.1109/ESEM.2009.5314235

Bandura, E. (2003). Interview with Professor Michael Byram The concept of intercultural competence. Symposium on Intercultural Competence and Education for Citizenship. http://corydoras.nazwa.pl/ptn/zasoby/mwalat2.rtf

Berk, L. E. (2018). Development Through the Lifespan. Pearson.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv26071r6

Bruner, J. (1960). The Process of Education. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. - References - Scientific Research Publishing. https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1412274

Catalano, H., & Catalano, C. (2022). Using Digital Storytelling In Early Childhood Education To Promote Child Centredness. https://doi.org/10.15405/epes.22032.16

Cheng, H. (2020). A Critical Review of Chinese Theoretical Research on Moral Education Since 2000: Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/2096531119886490, 2(4), 561–580. https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531119886490

Deborah L. Butler, Leyton Schnellert, & Sylvie C. Cartier. (2013). Layers of Self- and Co-Regulation: Teachers Working Collaboratively to Support Adolescents′ Self-Regulated Learning through Reading. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1155/2013/845694

Dewey, J., & Sidney, H. (2008). Democracy and Education (J. A. Boydston, Ed.; 1st edition). Southern Illinois University Press.

Gardner, H. E. (2011). Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (3rd edition). Basic Books.

Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. Health Information & Libraries Journal, 26(2), 91–108. https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1471-1842.2009.00848.X

Gul Pinar & Sibel Peksoy. (2016). Simulation-Based Learning in Healthcare Ethics Education. https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=63167

Inha, K. (2025). Toward ethical praxis in longitudinal research with children: Reflecting on ethical tensions in participatory research. Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, 4(1), 100173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2024.100173

Kohlberg, L. (1981). The Philosophy of Moral Development Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice /Lawrence Kohlberg. –. –. Harper & Row, C1981.

Kolb, D. (2014). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (2nd edition). Pearson FT Press.

Lampropoulos, G., Keramopoulos, E., Diamantaras, K., & Evangelidis, G. (2022). Augmented Reality and Gamification in Education: A Systematic Literature Review of Research, Applications, and Empirical Studies. Applied Sciences, 12(13), Article 13. https://doi.org/10.3390/app12136809

Lapsley, D. K., & Yeager, D. (2013). Moral-character education. In Handbook of psychology: Educational psychology, Vol. 7, 2nd ed (pp. 147–177). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Larry Nucci. (2008). Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development. https://www.amazon.com/Nice-Not-Enough-Facilitating-Development/dp/0131886517

Lee Jia Yee, Nor Mashitah Mohd Radzi, & Nordin Mamat. (2022). Learning through Play in Early Childhood: A Systematic Review. https://hrmars.com/index.php/IJARPED/article/view/16076/Learning-through-Play-in-Early-Childhood-A-Systematic-Review

Lickona, T. (1992). Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Bantam.

Lundy, L., Murray, C., Smith, K., & Ward, C. (2024). Young children's right to be heard on the quality of their education: Addressing potential misunderstandings in the context of early childhood education. British Educational Research Journal, n/a(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3968

Maria Hatzigianni, Tanya Stephenson, Linda J. Harrison, Manjula Waniganayake, Philip Li, Lennie Barblett, Fay Hadley, Rebecca Andrews, Belinda Davis, & Susan Irvine. (2023). The role of digital technologies in supporting quality

International Journal of Business, Law, and Education
Publisher: IJBLE Scientific Publications Community Inc.

Volume 5, Number 2, 2024
https://ijble.com/index.php/journal/index

improvement in Australian early childhood education and care settings. https://ijccep.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40723-023-00107-6

Marta Licardo, Jasminka Mezak, & İlke Evin Gencel. (2023). Teaching for the Future in Early Childhood Education. https://press.um.si/index.php/ump/catalog/book/760

McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. American Journal of Sociology, 82(6), 1212–1241. https://doi.org/10.1086/226464

McGovern, G., Pinetta, B. J., Montoro, J. M., Channey, J., Rosario-Ramos, E., & Rivas-Drake, D. (2023). Stretching towards social justice: A case study of transformative social and emotional learning (SEL). Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy, 2, 100018. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sel.2023.100018

Mello, D. A. A. D., & Gobara, S. T. (2013). Analysis of Interactions in a Virtual Learning Environment Based in Vygotsky's Theory. Creative Education, 04(10), 54–60. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2013.410A009

National Academies of Sciences, E., Education, D. of B. and S. S. and, Board on Children, Y., Eight, C. on E. the O. G. for Y. C. from B. to A., Hutton, R., & Allen, L. (2023). Opportunity Gaps in Early Care and Education Experienced by Children from Birth to Pre-K. National Academies Press (US). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK596379/

Olga Chernikova, Nicole Heitzmann, Matthias Stadler, Doris Holzberger, Tina Seidel, & Frank Fischer. (2020). Simulation-Based Learning in Higher Education: A Meta-Analysis. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0034654320933544

Piaget, J. (1999). Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood. Psychology Press.

Rachel Barr, Heather Kirkorian, Sarah Coyne, & Jenny Radesky. (2024). Early Childhood and Digital Media. https://www.cambridge.org/core/elements/abs/early-childhood-and-digital-media/226523438D797D8785837568EFCAB89B

Rahiem, M. D. H. (2021). Storytelling in early childhood education: Time to go digital. International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 15(1), 4. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-021-00081-x

Ravaghi, H., Guisset, A.-L., Elfeky, S., Nasir, N., Khani, S., Ahmadnezhad, E., & Abdi, Z. (2023). A scoping review of community health needs and assets assessment: Concepts, rationale, tools and uses. BMC Health Services Research, 23(1), 44. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-08983-3

Schunk, D. H. (2012). Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective. Pearson.

Smith, C. L., Wiser, M., Anderson, C. W., & Krajcik, J. (2006). FOCUS ARTICLE: Implications of Research on Children's Learning for Standards and Assessment: A Proposed Learning Progression for Matter and the Atomic-Molecular Theory. Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives, 4(1–2), 1–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/15366367.2006.9678570

Tanaka, F., & Matsuzoe, S. (2012). Children teach a care-receiving robot to promote their learning: Field experiments in a classroom for vocabulary learning. J. Hum.-Robot Interact., 1(1), 78–95. https://doi.org/10.5898/JHRI.1.1.Tanaka

Tancred, T., Paparini, S., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Thomas, J., Fletcher, A., Campbell, R., & Bonell, C. (2018). A systematic review and synthesis of theories of change of school-based interventions integrating health and academic education as a

novel means of preventing violence and substance use among students. Systematic Reviews, 7(1), 190. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-018-0862-y

Treiman, R., Decker, K., Robins, S., Ghosh, D., & Rosales, N. (2017). Parent–child conversations about literacy: A longitudinal, observational study* | Journal of Child Language. Cambridge Core. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000917000307

Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Harvard University Press.

Walsh, K., Ey, L., Hand, K., Smith, R., Howard, S., Fenton, A., Whiteford, C., Brown, M., Pinnock, R., & Rodier, L. (2023). Child protection and safeguarding in initial teacher education: A systematic scoping review. Children and Youth Services Review, 150, 106951. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106951

Xezonaki, A. (2022). Gamification in preschool science education. Advances in Mobile Learning Educational Research, 2(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.25082/AMLER.2022.02.001

Xiaoshu Xu, Yujie Su, Wilson Cheong Hin Hong, Yunfeng Zhang, & Tengteng Zhuang. (2024). The impact of a Personal Learning Environment on Chinese postgraduates' online self-regulated learning skills / Impacto de un Entorno Personal de Aprendizaje en las aptitudes de aprendizaje autorregulado en línea de estudiantes de posgrado en China-. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/02103702231225382?icid=int.sj-full-text.similar-articles.2