

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN SHAPING AGENTS OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract Legal education plays a pivotal role in shaping students not only as legal professionals but also as agents of change capable of contributing to social transformation and the strengthening of the rule of law. This study aims to analyze the strategic role of legal education in higher education institutions from a normative juridical perspective, focusing on how legal norms, principles, and concepts mandate and frame the transformative function of legal education. Employing normative legal research, this study applies the statute approach and the conceptual approach. The statute approach is used to examine constitutional provisions, higher education laws, and regulations governing national education that emphasize character development, legal awareness, and civic responsibility. The conceptual approach is utilized to analyze key doctrines and legal concepts such as legal education, legal consciousness, justice, and agent of change within the framework of legal theory and educational philosophy. The results of the study demonstrate that legal education is normatively positioned as a strategic instrument for internalizing legal values, fostering critical legal reasoning, and cultivating ethical responsibility among students. Legal norms implicitly and explicitly require higher education institutions to integrate legal education that goes beyond technical legal knowledge and contributes to the formation of socially responsive and justice-oriented graduates. However, the study also identifies a normative gap between the objectives articulated in legal norms and the implementation of legal education, which often remains dominated by positivistic and doctrinal teaching models. This study concludes that strengthening legal education as a means of forming agents of change is a constitutional and statutory imperative. Normative reorientation toward value-based, ethical, and socially grounded legal education is essential to ensure coherence between legal ideals and educational practice in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Legal Education; Agent of Change; Normative Legal Research; Higher Education; Rule of Law.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is constitutionally established as a state governed by law (*rechtstaat*). This fundamental principle is explicitly enshrined in Article 1 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which stipulates that Indonesia is a state based on law. As a consequence, all aspects of national life including governance, social order, economic development, and education must be grounded in and regulated by legal norms. Within this framework, law is not merely perceived as a set of written rules, but as a normative system that guides behavior, shapes social relations, and ensures justice, legal certainty, and public order.[1]

Education, as one of the core instruments of nation-building, occupies a strategic position within the legal system of Indonesia. Normatively, education is not only a social service but also a constitutional right and a state obligation. Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution affirms that every citizen has the right to education and that the government is responsible for organizing a national education system that enhances faith, piety, and moral character in order to advance the intellectual life of the nation. Consequently, education including higher education and legal education must be understood as an integral component of the legal order and the constitutional mandate of the state.[2] Higher education, in particular, plays a crucial role in shaping human resources who possess intellectual capacity, moral integrity, and legal awareness. From a juridical normative perspective, higher education is not solely oriented toward academic excellence or labor market demands, but also toward the formation of responsible citizens who are capable of contributing to the development of a democratic and just society. This normative orientation is clearly articulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process so that learners actively develop their potential to become individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens.[3]

Within this legal framework, legal education holds a particularly strategic position. Legal education is designed not only to transmit legal knowledge and technical skills but also to cultivate legal reasoning, ethical judgment, and a sense of justice. As a normative discipline, law is prescriptive in nature it does not merely describe social realities (*das sein*), but also determines what ought to be (*das sollen*). Therefore, legal education carries a moral and normative responsibility to shape individuals who understand the law not only as a formal system of rules, but also as an instrument for achieving social justice and protecting human dignity.[4]

The strategic role of legal education becomes even more significant when viewed in relation to the concept of agent of change. In the context of higher education, students are widely recognized as potential agents of social transformation individuals who possess the intellectual capacity, critical awareness, and moral responsibility to challenge injustice and contribute to societal reform. However, the emergence of students as agents of change is not an automatic process. It requires a structured and value-oriented educational process that nurtures critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. Legal education, by its very nature, is well positioned to fulfill this transformative role.[5]

Normatively, the role of students as agents of change finds its legal basis in the objectives of higher education as stipulated in Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education. Article 5 of this law explicitly states that higher education aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, morally upright, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent, and cultured for the benefit of the nation. Moreover, higher education is mandated to develop character and civilization, thereby reinforcing the idea that universities are not merely centers of knowledge production but also institutions for character formation and social leadership. From a juridical normative standpoint, students are legal subjects who will eventually occupy strategic roles in society as policymakers, law enforcers, legal practitioners, academics, and community leaders. Therefore, higher education institutions bear a normative responsibility to ensure that students are equipped not only with technical expertise but also with a strong sense of legal consciousness (legal awareness) and ethical commitment. Legal education thus becomes a

critical vehicle for shaping students into agents of change who are capable of upholding the rule of law and promoting justice in society.[6]

Despite this normative ideal, the implementation of legal education in higher education institutions often reveals a significant gap between legal norms and educational practice. In many cases, legal education remains dominated by a doctrinal and positivistic approach that emphasizes the memorization of statutes, legal principles, and judicial decisions. While such an approach is important for understanding the structure of the legal system, it often neglects the broader social, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of law. As a result, students may acquire technical legal knowledge without developing a deep understanding of the social function of law or the moral courage required to challenge injustice.

This condition presents a serious normative concern. In a state governed by law, legal education should function as a means of strengthening the rule of law and fostering public trust in legal institutions. However, when legal education fails to instill ethical values and social responsibility, it risks producing legal professionals who are legally competent but morally indifferent. Such a situation undermines the normative goals of the legal system and weakens the capacity of law to function as an instrument of social change.[7]

The urgency of strengthening the role of legal education as a means of forming agents of change is further reinforced by the contemporary challenges faced by the Indonesian legal system. Issues such as weak law enforcement, corruption, unequal access to justice, and human rights violations continue to erode public confidence in legal institutions. These challenges highlight the need for a new generation of legal actors who possess not only legal expertise but also integrity, critical awareness, and a strong commitment to justice. Normatively, this responsibility falls within the mandate of higher education institutions, particularly law faculties and legal education programs. In addition, the development of democracy and human rights in Indonesia requires citizens who are legally literate and actively engaged in public life. Legal education plays a vital role in promoting democratic values by equipping students with an understanding of constitutional principles, human rights norms, and mechanisms of accountability. From a juridical normative perspective, education serves as a form of civic education (civic legal education) that prepares students to participate meaningfully in democratic processes and to act as watchdogs of state power.[8]

The concept of agent of change in legal education is also closely related to the normative function of law as a tool of social engineering. Law is not merely a reactive mechanism that responds to social problems; it is also a proactive instrument that can shape social behavior and promote progressive change. Legal education, therefore, must be oriented toward empowering students to use legal knowledge as a means of addressing social injustice and promoting legal reform. This normative orientation aligns with the constitutional aspiration to achieve social justice for all Indonesian people, as articulated in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution.[9] Furthermore, the rapid development of technology and globalization has introduced new legal challenges that require adaptive and forward-thinking legal actors. Issues such as digital rights, cybercrime, environmental protection, and transnational legal disputes demand a legal education system that fosters critical analysis and ethical reasoning. From a normative standpoint, legal education must evolve to ensure that students are prepared to respond to these challenges while upholding fundamental legal principles and values.[10]

In this context, the strengthening of legal education as a means of forming agents of change is not merely a pedagogical concern, but a normative imperative. Higher education institutions are legally and morally obligated to align their educational practices with the objectives and values enshrined in the national legal framework. This includes integrating legal ethics, human rights education, and social justice perspectives into the legal curriculum, as well as promoting participatory and reflective learning methods that encourage students to engage with real-world legal issues. The juridical normative approach adopted in this study focuses on analyzing legal education through the lens of positive law, legal principles, and legal doctrines. This approach emphasizes the examination of constitutional provisions, statutory regulations, and normative objectives that govern higher education and legal education in Indonesia. By doing so, the study seeks to identify the

normative foundations that support the role of legal education in shaping students as agents of change.

Moreover, this normative analysis also aims to assess the consistency between the legal framework governing education and the actual practices of legal education in higher education institutions. Identifying gaps and inconsistencies between normative ideals and practical implementation is essential for developing recommendations that strengthen the transformative role of legal education. In this sense, the juridical normative approach provides a solid foundation for evaluating and reformulating legal education policies and practices.[11]

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that legal education occupies a strategic normative position in the formation of agents of change within higher education. This role is firmly grounded in constitutional mandates, statutory provisions, and fundamental legal principles that emphasize justice, democracy, and the rule of law. Strengthening legal education is therefore not only a practical necessity but also a normative obligation aimed at realizing the ideals of a just and democratic legal state. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the strategic role of legal education in shaping agents of change in higher education from a juridical normative perspective. By analyzing the legal foundations and normative objectives of legal education, this study aims to contribute to the development of a more value-oriented and socially responsive legal education system that aligns with the constitutional vision of Indonesia as a state governed by law and justice.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs normative legal research, also referred to as doctrinal legal research, which focuses on examining law as a normative system. Normative legal research analyzes legal norms, principles, doctrines, and legal concepts as they are formulated in statutory regulations and legal theory. The primary objective of this approach is to identify, interpret, and systematize legal norms in order to address legal issues based on coherence, consistency, and normative validity rather than empirical measurement.

In the context of this study, normative legal research is used to analyze the strategic role of legal education in shaping students as agents of change within higher education institutions, particularly by examining the legal foundations, objectives, and normative mandates governing legal education in Indonesia. This research applies two main approaches commonly used in normative legal studies, namely the statute approach and the conceptual approach. The analysis of legal materials is carried out using qualitative normative analysis. This method involves interpreting legal norms and principles through logical reasoning, systematic classification, and normative evaluation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Normative Position of Legal Education within the Constitutional and Statutory Framework

The results of this normative legal research demonstrate that legal education occupies a constitutionally and statutorily strategic position within the Indonesian legal system. The constitutional recognition of Indonesia as a state governed by law establishes a foundational obligation for the state to ensure that education functions as a mechanism for fostering legal awareness, ethical responsibility, and social justice. Within this framework, higher education and legal education in particular is not merely an academic enterprise but a constitutional instrument for cultivating legally conscious citizens.[12]

Statutory analysis confirms that the objectives of national education and higher education emphasize the holistic development of learners. Education is normatively required to produce individuals who are intellectually competent, morally grounded, socially responsible, and capable of participating actively in democratic life. Legal education, as part of higher education, is therefore normatively positioned as a vehicle for internalizing legal values and strengthening the rule of law. This position is not incidental but inherent in the legal framework governing education.[13]

The results indicate that the legal system does not conceptualize education as value-neutral. Instead, education is explicitly oriented toward the formation of character, civic responsibility, and

legal awareness. Consequently, legal education is legally mandated to go beyond technical legal training and contribute to the formation of graduates who are capable of engaging with legal and social problems in a principled and responsible manner.

Legal Education as a Normative Instrument for Social Transformation

The conceptual analysis reveals that legal education functions as a normative instrument for social transformation. Law, as a normative discipline, prescribes standards of behavior and articulates societal values such as justice, equality, and accountability. Legal education, therefore, plays a dual role: it transmits knowledge of legal norms and cultivates the ability to evaluate and apply those norms in pursuit of social justice.[14]

The findings show that legal education is intrinsically linked to the concept of agent of change. Students who are exposed to normative legal reasoning are expected to develop the capacity to question unjust laws, critique institutional practices, and advocate for reform. This transformative potential distinguishes legal education from purely technical or vocational forms of education. Legal education is normatively oriented toward shaping individuals who understand law as a moral and social institution rather than a mere procedural mechanism.

From a normative perspective, the role of legal education as a catalyst for social change is consistent with the broader function of law as an instrument of social engineering. The legal system is designed not only to regulate existing social relations but also to guide societal development toward normative ideals. Legal education supports this function by preparing future legal actors who are capable of interpreting and applying the law in a manner that advances justice and social welfare.

The Agent of Change Paradigm in Normative Legal Education

The results of this study demonstrate that the agent of change paradigm is normatively embedded within the objectives of higher education. Students are positioned as active participants in social life who are expected to contribute to societal improvement. This expectation is particularly relevant for students of law, who will eventually assume roles as judges, lawyers, policymakers, academics, and public officials.

The conceptual approach reveals that the agent of change is not merely an aspirational concept but a normative expectation rooted in the legal framework governing education. Legal education is required to equip students with legal consciousness, defined as an awareness of legal norms, values, and responsibilities. Legal consciousness enables students to recognize the social implications of legal rules and to act in ways that promote justice and accountability.[15]

The findings indicate that legal consciousness serves as the foundation for the development of agents of change. Without legal consciousness, students may possess legal knowledge but lack the ethical commitment and critical awareness necessary to challenge injustice. Legal education, therefore, must prioritize the cultivation of legal consciousness as a core educational outcome.

Alignment between Statutory Objectives and Transformative Legal Education

The statute-based analysis shows that there is a strong normative alignment between statutory objectives and the transformative role of legal education. Laws governing higher education emphasize character development, cultural advancement, and civic responsibility. These objectives implicitly require educational practices that foster critical thinking, ethical reflection, and social engagement.

However, the results also reveal that statutory provisions often articulate these objectives in broad and abstract terms. While this normative abstraction allows for institutional autonomy, it also creates ambiguity in implementation. Higher education institutions may interpret statutory objectives narrowly, focusing on academic performance and employability rather than social responsibility and ethical development.[16]

This ambiguity highlights the importance of normative interpretation. From a juridical normative perspective, statutory objectives must be interpreted teleologically, with reference to constitutional

values and the broader purpose of education. When interpreted in this manner, the legal framework clearly supports a model of legal education that emphasizes the formation of agents of change.[17]

Normative Gaps between Legal Ideals and Educational Practice

One of the most significant findings of this study is the identification of a normative gap between the ideals prescribed by law and the prevailing practices of legal education. Although legal norms mandate character formation and social responsibility, legal education in practice often remains dominated by doctrinal and positivistic approaches.

Instruction frequently prioritizes the mastery of legal texts, statutes, and procedural rules, with limited emphasis on ethical reasoning, social context, or critical analysis. This approach reflects a narrow interpretation of legal education that equates legal competence with technical proficiency. From a normative standpoint, such an approach is insufficient and inconsistent with the objectives of higher education.

The results indicate that this normative gap undermines the transformative potential of legal education. When students are trained primarily as technicians of law, they may lack the moral courage and social sensitivity required to act as agents of change. This outcome contradicts the normative expectation that legal education should contribute to the advancement of justice and the rule of law.[17]

Legal Education and the Internalization of Legal Values

The findings demonstrate that legal education plays a crucial role in the internalization of legal values among students. Legal values such as justice, equality before the law, legal certainty, and respect for human rights are foundational to the legal system. These values must be internalized, not merely understood at a cognitive level.

The conceptual analysis shows that internalization occurs when students engage with legal principles through normative reasoning and ethical reflection. Legal education provides a structured environment for such engagement, enabling students to connect abstract legal norms with concrete social realities. This process fosters a deeper understanding of law as a moral enterprise.[18]

The results indicate that the internalization of legal values is a prerequisite for the development of agents of change. Students who internalize legal values are more likely to act with integrity and to challenge practices that undermine justice. Legal education, therefore, has a normative responsibility to ensure that value internalization is a central component of the curriculum.

Legal Education and the Strengthening of the Rule of Law

The study finds that legal education has a direct normative function in strengthening the rule of law. The sustainability of the legal system depends on the availability of legal actors who respect legal norms and uphold democratic values. Legal education contributes to this sustainability by shaping the attitudes and dispositions of future legal professionals.

Students who receive value-oriented legal education are more likely to view the law as a public institution that serves the common good. This perspective fosters respect for legal institutions and enhances public trust in the legal system. Normatively, this outcome aligns with constitutional aspirations to establish a legal order that is just, democratic, and accountable.

The findings suggest that strengthening the rule of law through legal education requires a shift in educational priorities. Legal education must balance technical competence with ethical responsibility and social awareness. This balance is essential for producing legal actors who are capable of functioning as agents of change.

Normative Responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions

The results underscore the normative responsibilities of higher education institutions in implementing legal education. Institutions are legally obligated to align their educational practices

with constitutional mandates and statutory objectives. This obligation includes ensuring that legal education contributes to character formation and social development.

The analysis indicates that higher education institutions play a critical role in shaping the culture of legal education. Institutional policies, curricula, and pedagogical practices influence how legal norms and values are transmitted to students. From a normative perspective, institutions must actively promote educational models that support the development of agents of change.[19]

Failure to fulfill this responsibility risks undermining the objectives of the education system and weakening the role of law in society. Normatively, higher education institutions must recognize that the formation of agents of change is an integral part of their legal mandate.

Prescriptive Implications of the Normative Analysis

As a normative legal study, this research yields prescriptive implications for the development of legal education. The findings indicate that legal education should move beyond a purely doctrinal approach toward a value-based and principle-oriented model. This model emphasizes normative reasoning, ethical reflection, and critical engagement with legal issues.

Legal education should be designed to foster students' ability to analyze legal norms in light of constitutional values and social justice considerations. This prescriptive orientation is consistent with the function of normative legal research, which seeks to evaluate and refine legal norms rather than merely describe them.[20]

Synthesis of Research Results

Overall, the results of this study affirm that legal education holds a strategic normative role in shaping agents of change within higher education. This role is firmly grounded in constitutional principles, statutory mandates, and fundamental legal values. However, realizing this role requires a conscious effort to bridge the gap between normative ideals and educational practice.

The findings highlight the need for a reorientation of legal education toward its transformative function. By emphasizing legal consciousness, value internalization, and social responsibility, legal education can fulfill its normative mandate and contribute to the development of a just and democratic society.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that legal education occupies a strategic and normative position within higher education in shaping students as agents of change. From a juridical normative perspective, this role is firmly grounded in constitutional principles, statutory mandates, and fundamental legal values that emphasize justice, democracy, and the rule of law. Legal education is therefore not merely an academic or technical endeavor, but a normative instrument designed to cultivate legal consciousness, ethical responsibility, and social engagement among students.

The findings demonstrate that the legal framework governing education and higher education in Indonesia explicitly mandates the holistic development of students. These mandates implicitly require legal education to contribute to character formation and the internalization of legal values. As a normative discipline, law provides a prescriptive framework that guides behavior and social relations, thereby positioning legal education as a key mechanism for fostering students' capacity to critically engage with legal and social issues. In this context, the concept of agent of change emerges as an inherent normative expectation rather than a discretionary educational goal.

However, this study also reveals a significant normative gap between the ideals articulated in legal norms and the prevailing practices of legal education. Despite strong normative foundations, legal education in practice often remains dominated by doctrinal and positivistic approaches that prioritize technical proficiency over ethical reflection and social responsibility. This misalignment undermines the transformative potential of legal education and limits its capacity to produce graduates who are capable of advancing justice and strengthening the rule of law.

Accordingly, this study emphasizes the need for a normative reorientation of legal education within higher education institutions. Legal education must move beyond a purely text-based and

procedural model toward a value-oriented and principle-based approach that integrates legal ethics, human rights, and social justice into the curriculum. Such a reorientation is not only pedagogically desirable but also normatively required to ensure coherence between constitutional ideals, statutory objectives, and educational practice. In conclusion, strengthening the role of legal education as a means of shaping agents of change is both a legal obligation and a constitutional imperative. By aligning educational practices with normative legal principles, higher education institutions can fulfill their responsibility to produce graduates who are not only legally competent but also morally grounded and socially responsive. This alignment is essential for sustaining the rule of law and realizing the broader constitutional vision of a just, democratic, and dignified society.

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