

## EMPOWERING TRIGUNA VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BUILDING LEGAL AWARENESS THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LAW

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Article	Abstract
<p><i>Received: Des 02, 2025;</i> <i>Reviewed: Jan 07, 2026;</i> <i>Accepted: Feb 09, 2026;</i> <i>Published: Feb 26, 2026</i></p>	<p>Empowering students in building legal awareness is a form of community service that aims to improve understanding, attitudes, and compliance with the law among the younger generation. This activity was motivated by the low level of legal awareness among students at Triguna Vocational School, who tend to view the law normatively and instrumentally as merely rules and sanctions, rather than as a social mechanism that regulates order, justice, and the protection of rights in society. The approach used is a sociological approach to law with participatory methods, which actively involves students in the learning process and reflection on the social realities around them. The results of the activity show that increasing students' legal awareness requires contextual, communicative, and sustainable methods, accompanied by guidance and strengthening the role of students as agents of change in the school environment. In addition, the involvement of the school and the relevance of legal material to everyday life are important factors in the success of the program. This activity was carried out at SMK Triguna and is expected to be the first step in systematically and continuously building a culture of legal awareness among students.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> student empowerment, legal awareness, sociology of law, community service</p>

### A. INTRODUCTION

The legal awareness of Triguna vocational school students is still relatively low, characterized by a limited understanding of the law in terms of prohibitions and sanctions, without a balanced understanding of the function of law in maintaining social order, justice, and the protection of rights in community life. This condition is reflected in the continued existence of various deviant behaviors both inside and outside the school environment, such as

violations of rules and regulations, bullying (including cyberbullying), traffic violations, misuse of social media, and a low understanding of legal rights and obligations in the context of internships, work, and digital interactions. This phenomenon shows that the process of internalizing legal values has not been optimal.

Sociologically, vocational school students are in the late adolescent phase, which is characterized by identity searching, a tendency to follow peer groups, and increased interaction with public spaces and the world of work. These characteristics make vocational school students very vulnerable to the influence of their social environment, popular culture, and digital media. At Triguna Vocational School, the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of students, some of whom come from families under economic pressure to find work immediately, also influence their views on the law. The law is often perceived as an administrative obstacle rather than an instrument of protection and certainty in work and social relations.

From an institutional perspective, schools as agents of legal socialization have not been fully able to provide contextual and applicable legal education. Existing legal education tends to be textual and theoretical, failing to touch on the empirical and sociological dimensions of law in students' daily lives. Inconsistent enforcement of rules and regulations, weak role models, and a lack of space for critical dialogue about law have resulted in legal norms not being internalized as values, but rather as formal obligations. As a result, there is a gap between the written rules and actual practice (gap between law in the books and law in action).

Furthermore, the social environment in which students live also shapes their perceptions of the law. Informal conflict resolution practices, low trust in law enforcement officials, and strong local social norms that sometimes conflict with positive law create normative ambiguity. In this context, students find it difficult to distinguish between social norms, moral norms, and legal norms, resulting in situational and pragmatic legal compliance.

The development of information technology and social media exacerbates this condition. Access to unvalidated legal information, the normalization of unlawful behavior in digital media, and a lack of digital legal literacy make students vulnerable to engaging in unlawful acts without awareness of the consequences. On the other hand, digital media actually has great potential as a means of legal education and empowerment if it is used in a focused and participatory manner.

Based on these conditions, the core problems faced by the partner (Triguna Vocational School) include: (1) low substantive and contextual understanding of the law; (2) the gap between local social norms and positive law; (3) weak internalization of legal values through school culture; (4) the strong negative influence of peer groups and digital media; and (5) limited access for students to dialogue-based and educational legal education and institutions.

Nevertheless, SMK Triguna has strategic potential for empowerment interventions. The practical and applied nature of the students allows for the application of learning approaches

based on real cases, simulations, and direct experiences. The support of the school institution, opportunities for collaboration with legal practitioners and related institutions, and the use of digital technology are important social capital in building sustainable legal awareness.

Therefore, the sociological approach to law is considered relevant and strategic as the basis for community service programs. This approach not only places law as a normative text, but as a living social phenomenon, influenced by culture, social structures, power relations, and everyday practices. Through this approach, Triguna vocational school students are expected not only to know the law, but also to understand its social meaning, develop critical awareness, and be able to behave lawfully and responsibly in their personal, social, and professional lives.

Low legal awareness among students is evident in the prevalence of deviant behavior such as fights between students, bullying, illegal street racing, sexual crimes, physical violence, and psychological abuse. Students still do not understand their legal rights and obligations, viewing the law as merely a form of punishment rather than a social guideline that protects everyone. Education can be used as a means of increasing legal awareness. Through education, everyone can develop properly, and education can produce a young generation with good theoretical and practical knowledge. Every country has the aspiration to become a developed country.

The quality of education greatly influences human resources because education is a process of producing an excellent young generation for the nation, and the progress of a nation will be very difficult to achieve if education fails. Legal education in schools today is not yet adequate in terms of input, process, and results. This is because students only know school rules and lack knowledge of the laws that apply in society. Regarding the laws that apply in society, there are many violations committed by school children, such as negative content on social media, cyberbullying, hate speech, and the spread of hoaxes. Not only that, but violations of the law are often committed by school students, such as gang fights, traffic violations, and others. Therefore, the weak legal awareness among school students (pupils) is due to the lack of legal education among pupils, which is not taught in a practical manner at school, resulting in a lack of legal awareness among pupils.

## **B. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research Methodology:** This research/service project utilizes a qualitative research method with a sociological approach to law. This method was chosen because the objective of the activity is not only to determine the normative level of students' legal knowledge, but also to gain an in-depth understanding of legal behavior, legal awareness, and the relationship between law and social reality as experienced by Triguna Vocational School students in their daily lives. The type of research used is descriptive qualitative research, which aims to describe, analyze, and understand social phenomena in depth based on non-numerical data.

In this context, qualitative research is used to explore how the understanding, attitudes, and legal behavior of Triguna vocational school students are formed, as well as how the empowerment process can influence their legal awareness. This research does not focus on statistical measurements, but rather on the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of the research subjects regarding the law. The approach used is a sociological approach to law, which views law as a living social phenomenon that interacts with the values, norms, culture, and structures of society. Through this approach, law is not understood solely as written rules (law in the books), but also as social practices (law in action). The sociological approach to law

allows researchers to analyze how legal norms are perceived, accepted, obeyed, or even ignored by Triguna vocational school students, as well as the social factors that influence their level of legal awareness.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Concept of Community Empowerment

In social science studies, empowerment is often defined as an effort to meet the needs of individuals, groups, and society as a whole. Society itself is a collection of individuals who live in a certain area, have bonds of togetherness, and engage in continuous social interaction.<sup>7</sup> The fulfillment of these needs includes access to various resources and involvement in social activities. Thus, empowerment acts as a means and a process to increase the capabilities and independence of society.

Empowerment can also be understood as a positive effort to transform weak or powerless conditions into strong and independent ones.<sup>8</sup> According to Sumodiningrat and Wulandari, empowerment means providing encouragement or energy so that a person or group can move and act independently. In addition, empowerment is also a strategic step to increase active community participation in the development process. This includes a shift from a community that lacks knowledge, skills, or attitudes that support development, to a community that is more aware, skilled, and has a productive mentality.

In general, the main objective of every development program is to improve community welfare. If development is carried out through an empowerment approach, the expected outcome of welfare will be easier to achieve.<sup>10</sup> The success of development is largely determined by the extent to which the community and the government are able to work together. Without the active involvement of the community, government development efforts tend to be suboptimal, and the output will not fully address the real needs of the community.

The empowerment paradigm began to develop in the early 1990s, marked by a change in the approach to the development process that placed greater emphasis on community-based knowledge and skills mapping. This paradigm emerged in response to the realization that development can no longer be determined solely by those in power, such as the state, but requires the active participation of the community itself. The previous development approach, based on modernization theory that emphasized economic aspects to achieve national independence, has not been able to have a significant impact on improving the welfare of the community.

In this new paradigm, the development of knowledge and skills at both the individual and community levels is seen as the main foundation for encouraging communities to change their living conditions. Empowerment can be achieved by building individual confidence and

capacity, as well as strengthening communities through collective action based on cooperation and common goals.

The concept of empowerment itself emphasizes people-centered and participatory development values.<sup>14</sup> In this case, empowerment can be analyzed through three main aspects: first, enabling, which is creating conditions that allow communities to develop their potential; second, empowering, which is strengthening the community's capabilities by providing resources that support independence; and third, protecting, which is protecting vulnerable community groups from becoming further marginalized in the development process.

One important element in the success of community empowerment programs is the active participation of the community itself. In the context of empowerment, communities or community groups are not positioned as objects, but as the main subjects in the implementation of an activity or program. Community involvement in every stage of the activity is an important foundation for creating a sustainable impact.

Community involvement in the empowerment process is an important factor that enables the creation of a conducive climate for developing their potential. The basic assumption of this approach is that every individual and community has power or strength, albeit in different levels and forms. Therefore, empowerment is not only aimed at community groups that completely lack capacity, but also at those who already have potential but have not developed optimally to achieve independence.

The implementation of community empowerment work patterns can serve as guidelines in developing activity plans and strategies. These patterns provide a framework that can be used to identify empowerment indicators and evaluate the extent to which the processes and results achieved support community capacity building. Unfortunately, even though the discourse on empowerment is growing, discussions on how to operationalize this concept at the field level are still limited. Efforts to use a design approach in community capacity building are also still rare.

Village communities are social entities with great potential to become independent, advanced, and developed. Community-based empowerment activities in villages are very important as a form of correction to the limited access of communities to development, which as so far been top-down in nature. Village communities generally still have strong cultures and cultural values, which can actually be an important foundation in developing a participation-based empowerment model. Therefore, empowerment strategies that actively involve the community are very relevant to be implemented in villages as an effort to build sustainable independence.

## **B. Legal Awareness**

Legal awareness is self-awareness without pressure, coercion, or orders from outside to comply with applicable laws. With legal awareness in society, the law does not need to impose sanctions. Sanctions are only imposed on citizens who are proven to have violated the law. The role of public legal awareness, as well as the purpose of the law itself, is to ensure certainty and justice. In society, there are always differences between patterns of behavior or conduct that are accepted in society and patterns of behavior that are desired by legal norms (rules). This can lead to the emergence of problems in the form of social gaps, so that at certain times there is a tendency for conflicts and social tensions to occur, which can certainly disrupt the course of social change in the desired direction. This situation occurs because the laws that are created are expected to

serve as guidelines (standards) for the community to act upon, but there is no legal awareness, so there tends to be no obedience to the law.

### **C. Sociological Approach to Law**

The sociological approach to law views law as part of social life, not just theory or rules. Law is more relevant in shaping legal awareness. The sociological approach to law is a way of studying law by highlighting the reciprocal relationship between law and social phenomena in society empirically and analytically. This approach does not only view law as a written norm, but also looks at how law functions and is applied.

### **D. Education**

Education is a process undertaken by an individual to discover their true self, which is done by observing and learning, which then gives rise to actions and behaviors. Education is actually not much different from learning as developed by the behaviorist school of psychology. However, this term is often understood and interpreted differently from learning. It is frequently used in educational approaches, where its meaning goes beyond mere learning. Education is a learning process that aims to develop an individual's potential in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits. Education does not only take place formally in schools or educational institutions, but can also occur non-formally or informally in everyday life. This process involves conscious guidance so that a person can experience positive changes in the way they think, feel, and act. Education also plays an important role in shaping a person's character and morals so that they are not only smart in science, but also have good and responsible behavior. With education, it is hoped that individuals can become independent, broad-minded individuals who are able to contribute positively to society.

### **E. Empowering Triguna Vocational School Students in Building Legal Awareness through the Sociological Approach to Law**

The empowerment of Triguna vocational school students in building legal awareness is a strategic effort to instill an understanding of law that is not only normative but also contextual and applicable in social life. Through a planned and sustainable empowerment process, students are guided to understand law as an instrument for regulating social life that upholds the values of order, justice, and protection of rights, so that they are able to consciously and responsibly develop an attitude of law-abidingness. The following are forms of empowerment of Triguna vocational school students in building legal awareness through a sociological approach to law:

**a. Empowerment through Contextual Legal Education and Counseling**

The first form of empowerment is carried out through education and legal counseling designed contextually in accordance with the social realities and characteristics of Triguna Vocational School students. This counseling not only emphasizes a textual understanding of legal norms but also the sociological aspects of law, namely the relationship between legal rules, social values, and community behavior. The material presented includes laws and regulations relevant to the lives of teenagers, such as the Child Protection Law, the Information and Electronic Transactions Law (ITE Law), traffic laws, and the basics of labor law related to field work practices. In this process, students were invited to understand the background of the formation of laws, the objectives of their regulation, and the social and legal impacts of violations. With this approach, students not only learned what is prohibited or permitted, but also understood why laws exist and how they function to maintain order, justice, and the protection of rights in society.

**b. Empowerment through Case Analysis, Critical Discussion, and Socio-Legal Simulation**

The second form of empowerment is realized through case analysis, critical discussion, and socio-legal simulation activities that involve the active participation of students. The cases raised are issues that students often encounter in their daily lives, such as cyberbullying, gang fights, school disciplinary violations, social media abuse, and traffic violations. Through discussions and case studies, students are trained to identify legal issues, understand the relationship between social norms and legal norms, and assess the social and legal consequences of an action. Simulations or role-playing activities are also conducted to provide students with direct experience in understanding the conflict resolution process, the roles of the parties involved, and the importance of fair and proportional law enforcement. This approach is in line with the sociological perspective of law, which emphasizes that legal awareness grows through social interaction and real experience, not merely through memorization of legal norms.

**c. Empowerment through the Formation of Agents of Change and Strengthening of the School's Legal Culture**

The third form of empowerment is aimed at developing students as *agents of change* in building a culture of legal awareness in schools and communities. Students are encouraged to be role models in complying with school rules and legal norms, as well as to play an active role in spreading the values of legal awareness to their peers through group discussions, legal awareness campaigns, and digital media-based educational activities. This approach utilizes peer influence as a social force in shaping students' legal behavior. In addition, empowerment is also carried out through the integration of legal values into school culture by involving teachers and educational staff as role models. Consistency in the implementation of rules and regulations, exemplary behavior, and open communication between the school and students are important factors in strengthening the internalization of legal awareness. Thus, legal awareness does not become merely individual knowledge, but develops into a collective culture that lives within the school environment.

## **F. Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Process of Empowering Triguna Vocational School Students to Build Legal Awareness through a Sociological Approach to Law**

### **a. Supporting Factors**

#### **1. Support from Student Characteristics and Practical Legal Needs**

One of the main supporting factors in the process of empowering Triguna vocational school students is the characteristics of students who tend to be practical, applicable, and close to social reality. Vocational high school students are in the late adolescent phase, preparing to enter the world of work and a broader social life, so they have a real need for an understanding of the law that is directly related to their daily activities, such as the use of social media, traffic safety, and rights and obligations in employment relationships. This condition is an important asset in the application of a sociological approach to law, because students find it easier to accept and understand the law when it is linked to their concrete experiences and the problems they face. An approach that places the law as part of social reality makes the empowerment process more relevant and meaningful for students.

#### **2. Institutional Support from the School and the Role of Educators**

The next supporting factor is institutional support from Triguna Vocational School, both from the school management, teachers, and educational staff. The school's openness to conducting legal counseling, education, and discussion activities creates a climate conducive to the internalization of legal awareness values. Teachers and educators involved act as role models in the application of discipline and compliance with rules. This exemplary behavior is very important in the perspective of legal sociology, because legal behavior is not only learned through texts, but also through social interactions and real examples in everyday life in the school environment.

#### **3. Support for Participatory Methods and Media Utilization**

The use of participatory learning methods, such as case studies, group discussions, simulations, and the use of digital media, is also a significant supporting factor. These methods encourage the active involvement of students in the legal learning process, so that it is not one-sided and normative. The use of digital media, such as educational videos and simple legal content, helps bridge the learning styles of the younger generation who are familiar with technology. Thus, the sociological approach to law can be implemented more effectively through methods that suit the characteristics and needs of students.

- a) Low Initial Legal Literacy and Pragmatic Attitudes toward Law** One of the main obstacles in the empowerment process is the low level of initial legal literacy among Triguna vocational school students. Many students do not yet understand basic legal concepts, rights and obligations, and the legal consequences of an action. In addition, some students have a pragmatic attitude towards the law, viewing it merely as a set of

rules whose sanctions must be avoided, rather than as a system of values that must be respected. This condition means that the process of empowering must start from the basics and requires more intensive time and approaches.

**b) The Influence of Social Environment, Local Culture, and Social Media**

The next inhibiting factor comes from the social and cultural environment outside of school. Social practices that tolerate minor violations, informal conflict resolution, and low trust in law enforcement officials can weaken the messages of legal awareness conveyed in schools. In addition, the influence of peer groups and social media often encourages deviant behavior and normalizes violations of the law. From a sociological perspective, this condition reflects the gap between formal law and social practices, which has the potential to hinder the internalization of legal values among students.

**c) Limited Resources and Program Sustainability**

Another inhibiting factor is limited resources, in terms of time, facilitators, and budget, as well as the lack of integration of legal awareness empowerment programs into the school curriculum on an ongoing basis. Incidental programs that are not accompanied by long-term assistance risk producing unsustainable impacts. Without strengthening the school's legal culture and follow-up mechanisms, the legal awareness that has been built has the potential to weaken over time.

## D. CONCLUSION

The empowerment of Triguna vocational school students in building legal awareness through a sociological approach to law involves the following activities: empowerment through legal education and counseling, empowerment through case analysis, critical discussion, and social simulation, and empowerment through the formation of agents of change and the strengthening of the school's legal culture. Supporting and inhibiting factors in the process of empowering Triguna vocational school students to build legal awareness through a sociological approach to law include: supporting factors: student characteristics and practical legal needs, institutional support from schools and the role of educators, participatory methods, and the use of media. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include: low initial legal literacy and a pragmatic attitude towards the law, the influence of the social environment, local culture, and social media, limited resources, and program sustainability.

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