

The Significance of Integrating Education on Minors Protection Laws into Pre-service Teacher Training Programs

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*“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults.”
- F. Douglas*

Due to their immature physical and mental states and inadequate social experience, minors are particularly susceptible to various forms of harm, which could be from their homes, schools, and other environments. These adverse experiences can profoundly affect their physical and mental health and academic performance (Walsh et al., 2019), as well as their future growth and development. Hence, how to ensure the safety of minors has been a key issue in educational and social governance. Many countries have instituted laws and regulations to safeguard the rights and interests of minors. Teachers, as a group having regular communication with children, are one of the major forces in protecting the young generation. To enable teachers to successfully fulfill their protective duties, it is essential to systematically incorporate education on minors protection legislation into pre-service teacher training programs.

The significance of such education for teacher candidates is multi-faceted. First off, pre-service teachers will assume legal responsibility for protecting minors in their future roles. In the legal frameworks of many countries and territories, teachers are explicitly positioned as key actors in the child protection system (Mathews & Kenny, 2008), who are required to identify safety risks in time, take appropriate actions, and fulfill reporting obligations. This necessitates pre-service teachers acquiring basic legal understanding and practical knowledge before entering the profession. Furthermore, child protection involves sensitive topics such as mandatory reporting, evidence collection procedures, communicat

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ion boundaries, and privacy protection. Systematic education on relevant legislation only equips future teachers with professionalism in safeguarding students' rights but also helps them circumvent legal risks associated with ignorance of legal boundaries. Additionally, teachers' day-to-day classroom management and behaviors are also subject to relevant laws and regulations. Developing understanding in advance on practical issues, such as "corporal punishment and covert corporal punishment" and "forms of communication that may infringe on students' rights," is favorable for novice teachers maintaining lawful professional conduct.

As to teacher education institutions, it is one of their fundamental duties to have their curriculum design respond to the legal requirements and challenges of the teaching profession. As legal regulations on schools' accountability for child protection increases in many countries, integrating subject matter related to child protection and educational legislation into pre-service teacher education curricula has become a global trend. For example, the United Kingdom, formally incorporated education on child safety and protection into undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training programs from 2004 (Tarr et al., 2013). Some other countries use teacher qualification examinations as means of ensuring that teaching candidates possess basic knowledge about child protection legislation (e.g., China's teacher qualification exam includes assessments on educational regulations and professional ethics). Therefore, universities have the responsibility to equip prospective teachers with legal literacy through curricular improvement to ensure the latter meet societal expectations.

Despite the growing consensus about the importance of legal education for pre-service teachers, there are significant deficits in actual training practices. Many novice teachers enter the teaching profession without fully mastering the basic knowledge and skills in child protection (McKee & Dillenburger, 2012), remaining ill-prepared for potential challenges. Moreover, universities currently rely on speech-based training or single, adjunct child protection workshops to deliver such education. Yet, fragmentary approaches like these are less effective than expected in enhancing pre-service teachers' awareness and attitudes in this regard. Research reveals that truly effective development of child protection expertise in this group is contingent on structured, sustained curriculum arrangements and in-depth engagement with policies and case studies (Fenton, 2014; Tenorio, 2024). Although teacher education institutions in certain developed countries have experimented with more effective curricular programs on minors protection legislation, these initiatives have not been widely promoted within broader education systems, particularly in many developing countries, where institutionalized implementation of this education remains absent. Hence, increasing research on this topic is highly warranted.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 – An Awareness Call to Prospective Teachers in this issue is an examination of the awareness of provisions for care and protection of children under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015 in Indian prospective teachers. Employing mixed-method research design, the study analyzes the coverage of the Act in the current teacher education curricula through desk research and assesses the understanding of the law of 340 prospective teachers from Tamil Nadu, India, using a questionnaire survey. The findings reveals that there was no coverage of the ACT in current curricula for teacher training programs in Tamil Nadu, and the prospective teachers surveyed largely exhibited insufficient knowledge of the law. Based on its research results, the study recommends incorporating knowledge about the Juvenile Justice Act into teacher education curricula to enhance future educators' ability to tackle student behavioral issues, prevent classroom misconduct, and safeguard the rights of minors (Du et al., 2025). Despite its Indian context, the study highlights the universal importance of education on child protection legislation for pre-service teachers, offering a valuable reference for teacher training research.

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