

# The Current Situation and Educational Strategies of College Students' Rule of Law Literacy in the New Era

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**Keywords:** A New Era, College Students, Rule of Law Literacy, Educational Strategies

**Abstract:** Rule of law literacy is a key competence for college students in the new era which is important to build a country based on the rule of law. Based on the investigation of 1686 college students, the study found that the overall rule of law awareness of college students in the new era is fairly good. However, there are still the following problems: firstly, the mastery of the rule of law theory is less systematic. Secondly, the growth of the ability of the rule of law lags. Thirdly, lack of belief in the rule of law. The study put forward strategies to strengthen and improve the "integration", "functionalization", and "synergy" of rule of law education in families, schools, and society, to enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of rule of law literacy education for college students.

## 1. Introduction

The goal of building a socialist country under the rule of law puts forward higher requirements for the rule of law literacy of college students in the new era. In recent years, some problems that college students' legal literacy does not meet the requirements of the times due to their weak awareness of the rule of law have affected their growth and success. Based on this point, the topic of the times is proposed to explore the law of college students' legal literacy in the new era and to cultivate talents with the socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics.

## 2. The Connotation of Rule of Law Literacy of College Students in the New Era

The rule of law literacy of college students in the new era refers to the specific content of their attainment at the level of the rule of law. It has a very broad connotation which is the legal character and ability that college students should possess. Specifically, it is a synthesis of four aspects: knowledge of the rule of law, the spirit of the rule of law, belief in the rule of law, and ability of the rule of law.

Rule of law literacy refers to the mastery of relevant legal knowledge with efforts incorporated into the people's daily lives to safeguard the public interest. This requires individuals to continuously strive and cultivate their rule of law awareness, as well as excellently practical capability<sup>[1]</sup>. From the perspective of legal philosophy, Engisch pointed out that to raise public awareness of the law and enhance its popular appeal, the logic and methods of awareness of the law of non-law major college students should be taken as an important aspect<sup>[2]</sup>. Based on the perspective of Mary Douglas' cultural theory, Simon Halliday and Bronwen Morgan suggested that "the voice of collective dissent can affect legal awareness<sup>[3]</sup>." Serban and Mihaela, by discussing the relationship between individuals and the law, found that legal awareness is a complex and dynamic internal characteristic<sup>[4]</sup>. Germany's rule of law education is relatively flexible and states can carry out their own youth rule of law education based on the federal education bill and their respective stages and characteristics of education development. Besides, Germany emphasizes the rule of law education in family education, setting up specialized funds to support family legal education<sup>[5]</sup>. The United States places great emphasis on rule of law education in schools where both national and

state social science curriculum standards give priority to learning the values of the rule of law<sup>[6]</sup>. In his research on rule of law awareness education for college students, Brown B. F. in the United States argued that textbooks related to rule of law education should be an important part of school education, and schools should expand their educational channels, carriers, and platforms<sup>[7]</sup>. In 1978, the United States established the importance of the rule of law on the Internet by laws and paid high attention to the education of the rule of law on the Internet<sup>[8]</sup>; Deborah Williamson further investigated the effectiveness of rule of law education in universities based on the prevention of juvenile cybercrime<sup>[9]</sup>.

The above scholars have conducted some research on the connotation of rule of law literacy and rule of law literacy education, and have conducted an in-depth exploration of family legal education, school legal education, and social legal education, providing a basic reference for this study. However, there are still limitations: firstly, there is less research on the awareness, cultivation, and belief of the rule of law among college students; Secondly, there is less sufficient research on resource integration, collaborative education, and the formation of synergy among the three. Therefore, this study investigates and analyzes the current situation of the rule of law literacy of college students in the new era, explores the existing problems and causes to find effective strategies to enhance their rule of law literacy, and all-round development.

### **3. Analysis of the Current Situation of College Students' Rule of Law Literacy in the New Era**

#### **Analysis of the Problems and Causes of College Students' Rule of Law Literacy in the New Era**

#### **3.1. Research Objects and Methods**

A total of 1,800 undergraduates from the Dalian University of Technology were selected as the subjects of the questionnaire, and the questionnaire on the rule of law literacy of college students in the new era was used to survey according to the pre-planned proportional stratified sampling method. The actual recovery of 1,714 samples was 95.2%. After excluding invalid questionnaires, a total of 1686 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 93.7%. The overall score of rule of law literacy of college students in the new era was converted into a percentage system to analyze the survey results.

The questionnaire on the rule of law literacy of college students in the new era was used to carry out the investigation. The questionnaire includes four dimensions: knowledge of the rule of law, awareness of the rule of law, belief in the rule of law, and ability of the rule of law, with a total of 58 questions. The knowledge of the rule of law of college students refers to the mastery of college of the theory of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics for a new era and the knowledge of the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics with the constitution at its core. The awareness of the rule of law of college students refers to the subjective consciousness of putting the rule of law first with strengthening the knowledge of the rule of law. College students' belief in the rule of law refers to their trust in the rule of law after they have a sense of the rule of law. College students' ability of the rule of law refers to their ability to apply the law to solve problems with legal thinking. The questionnaire used Likert's five-point scoring, and through confirmatory factor analysis, the internal structure validity was good, with a half-point reliability of 0.874 and an internal consistency of 0.922.

#### **3.2. Current Situation of Rule of Law Literacy of College Students in the New Era**

The overall rule of law literacy of college students in the new era is good. The overall score of the rule of law literacy of college students in the new era is between 86.83 and 91.40, with an average of 88.86, indicating a good overall condition. Among them, the score of awareness of the rule of law and belief in the rule of law is above 90 points, indicating that college students have an active awareness of applying the law and a relatively firm belief in the rule of law.

Table 1 Average score of all dimensions of rule of law literacy of college students in the new era.

Item	Dimension/Factor	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation(SD)
A1-A9	Knowledge of rule of law	86.83	12.95
B1-B6	Awareness of rule of law	91.40	10.75
C1-C6	Belief of rule of law	90.94	11.09
D1-D5	Ability of rule of law	87.12	13.36
A1-D5	Rule of law literacy average score	88.86	8.81

### 3.2.1. College Students in the New Era Have a Relatively Rich Knowledge of the Rule of Law

The average score of college students in the new era in the dimension of the knowledge rule of law is 86.83, indicating a good command of knowledge of the rule of law among students overall. They have a good understanding and judgment of the rights, obligations, and execution standards stipulated in nine main fields of laws and regulations, including administrative regulations, procedural law, supervisory system, procedural law, criminal law, and civil law.

### 3.2.2. College Students in the New Era Have Relatively Mature Awareness of the Rule of Law

The average score of the awareness of the rule of law of college students in the new era is 91.4, about 5 points higher than the rule of law knowledge of college students in the new era, indicating that they have good subjectivity of the awareness of the rule of law. It is manifested in the understanding of the essence, status, and role of the Constitution, the relationship between the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Constitution, a correct judgment and high recognition of the national policy of governance is law-based and the goal of building a country based on the rule of law.

### 3.2.3. College Students in the New Era Have Relatively Firm Belief in the Rule of Law

The average score of college students' belief in the rule of law in the new era is 90.94, which is equivalent to the level of awareness of the rule of law, indicating that college students' belief in the rule of law is relatively clear and firm. Specifically, they trust and believe that law is the criterion to maintain social fairness, justice, and harmony, and believe from the bottom of their hearts that law is a guarantee of their rights and interests, and is one of the ways to solve disputes.

### 3.2.4. College Students in the New Era Have Relatively Strong Abilities of Rule of Law

The ability of college students to engage in legal behavior is reflected in their ability to solve legal problems based on their knowledge, awareness, and beliefs in the rule of law. The average score of the ability of the rule of law of college students in the new era is 87.12, showing that they have a strong ability of the rule of law. Specifically, they can take actions to safeguard their own and social interests when encountering consumer rights issues such as food safety, online fraud, counterfeit goods, intellectual property protection issues, and labor rights issues such as work-study assistance, labor contract signing, etc. This indicates that college students in the new era have a basic strong tendency and ability of the rule of law.

## 3.3. Analysis of the Rule of Law Literacy of College Students in the New Era

### 3.3.1. Insufficient Systematic Mastery of the Theory of the Rule of Law

Analyzing college students' rule of law literacy in the new era, a common problem among college students is their inadequate systematic mastery of the rule of law. Data reveals that 9.8%-16.1% of college students in the new era were "uncertain" when assessing the essence of rule of law knowledge and legislative principles, indicating a lack of full understanding of the socialist rule of law ideological system with Chinese characteristics and its theoretical basis.

A lack of systematic and consistent rule of law education curriculum makes long-term implementation challenging and contributes to a lack of systematic knowledge of the rule of law among college students in the new era. Currently, the rule of law education curriculum in primary, middle, and high schools, as well as universities, requires optimization to ensure proper age-

appropriate knowledge of the rule of law is conveyed.

The course “Ideology, Morality and Rule of Law” serves as the primary means of rule of law education for college students; however, the course content primarily emphasizes principles at the expense of practical knowledge. Additionally, this course is predominantly offered to freshmen, leading to inadequate rule-of-law literacy education for senior college students.

### **3.3.2. Delayed Development of Rule of Law Skills**

The growth of legal competency among college students in the new era is relatively lagging. According to survey results, the average score for knowledge of the rule of law among college students was 87.12, with scores higher for knowledge of the rule of law and lower for attitudes towards and belief in the rule of law, and lower than the average score for rule of law literacy. The percentage of college students who strongly agree with their ability to apply the rule of law did not exceed 60%, indicating that some college students still have deficiencies in this area. They lack experience in protecting their rights and seeking legal remedies, as well as applying legal knowledge to daily life.

Rule of law education in schools emphasizes the theory and neglects the practice, which leads to a lag in the development of the ability to rule of law among college students in the new era. Many schools are actively carrying out rule of law education, but there are still a great number of schools relying on traditional teaching methods, such as classroom teaching and written explanation, and lack a dynamic and interactive practical education model. Theoretical education employed by schools as the main means enables students to have a good command of a large amount of knowledge of the rule of law as soon as possible and improve test scores, however, it seems that students can't view the world from the perspective of law to apply the knowledge to daily life. Meanwhile, the current practice of rule of law education is still limited by the dilemma of insufficient channels for legal practice, and an effective interaction mechanism has not been established between schools and social resources, resulting in the lack of practical education in rule of law education, making it difficult to effectively carry out rule of law practice education.

### **3.3.3. Lack of Belief in the Rule of Law**

College students in the new era exhibit less confidence in the rule of law. According to survey data, fewer than 60% of college students in the new era strongly agree with the two questions “I believe in the law” and “I firmly believe that the rule of law can protect my rights and interests.” This indicates that their confidence level is inadequate. Despite efforts to prioritize rule of law education and publicity, some college students expressed doubts in these areas, revealing a lack of faith in the rule of law. These doubts may stem from concerns about the authority of the law or perceptions that the law is merely a restrictive mechanism without the ability to guarantee social fairness and justice.

The rule of law literacy of college students in the new era is heavily influenced by their environment. Traditional Chinese education values rites over the law, instilling in many students the belief that the less trouble the better. When human relationships are prioritized over legal principles, it hinders the development of rule of law education. Moreover, negative phenomena such as “a society of human relationships” and “relationship culture” still exist in society. Disappointingly, ineffective and unfair law enforcement undermines confidence in the law. Sudden and malicious events can further weaken the authority of the law. The beliefs of college students regarding the rule of law are significantly impacted by the implementation of the rule of law in universities. Improper management practices at certain universities can also adversely affect students' attitudes, contributing to their lack of faith in the rule of law.

## **4. Educational Strategies for Rule of Law Literacy of College Students in the New Era**

### **4.1. Integration of University, Middle School, and Primary School Curriculum in Rule of Law Education for College Students in the New Era**

The development of college students' rule of law literacy is a gradual and continuous process that necessitates the establishment of a comprehensive rule of law education curriculum system, which includes “large, medium, and small” components in ideological and political courses spanning primary school, middle school, high school, and university levels. This system must ensure coordination and progress towards teaching objectives at each stage, while also providing an overall layout of courses and teaching content<sup>[10]</sup>. By integrating rule of law education into the entire process of school education and adjusting course content and difficulty to match students' cognitive development patterns, we can facilitate the gradual and spiral rise of rule of law education.

The objective of rule of law education is integration. Specifically, in the context of school-based rule of law education, the objective is to strengthen students' understanding of the socialist rule of law. Therefore, rule of law education should prioritize legal issues and help students dispel doubts while improving their recognition of the socialist legal system. This will enhance their confidence in exercising law-based governance on all fronts and advancing the socialist rule of law in our country. Additionally, students should be guided on how to handle legal difficulties related to political rights and freedoms, the right to education, property rights, and personal rights through legal channels<sup>[11]</sup>. To achieve the goal of “integration” in legal education, phased objectives that progress gradually and spirally should be formulated based on the learning abilities of students at the university, middle school, and primary school levels.

The integration of the rule of law education curriculum implies building and enhancing an integrated legal education curriculum system for universities, middle schools, and primary schools within the ideological and political course systems. This can be achieved by continuously optimizing the legal education curriculum system. Junior high school students should be taught the rule of law knowledge relevant to social life, while senior high school students should focus on the theoretical knowledge of law. College students, on the other hand, should receive a more in-depth education on the relevant theoretical knowledge of the rule of law in China to reinforce their understanding and application of rule of law principles.

The integration of the rule of law education content suggests that the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of rule of law education for college students in the new era should start with the content of rule of law education, scientifically setting knowledge content, bridging the cognitive gap, and forming a complete knowledge chain of rule of law education<sup>[12]</sup>, to realize the integration of the rule of the law education content in schools. For example, at college, students should be trained to develop critical thinking and establish a firm belief in the rule of law. It is important to guide the rule of law needs of college students by combining social hot issues according to their actual situation<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **4.2. Functionalization of Rule of Law Literacy Structure of College Students in the New Era**

The rule of law literacy of college students in the new era consists of their knowledge of the rule of law, the spirit of the rule of law, belief in the rule of law, and ability to rule of law. Functionalization makes the internalized literacy structure externalize and needs to be achieved through practical means. The approach to the practice of rule of law education is extensive, and the functionalization of the rule of law literacy structure of college students in the new era should be carried out from three aspects: strengthening the rule of law education practice in class, enriching the rule of law cultural activities on campus and carrying out social practice activities outside school.

The practice of rule of law education in the classroom should be strengthened. In the rule of law education, efforts should be made to help college students better understand it and integrate it into daily life, to promote life-oriented rule of law education<sup>[14]</sup>. The ideological and political theory course should play a significant role in effectively improving their ability to use the rule of law. As a specialized course, practical courses should incorporate the rule of the law practice of college

students into the curriculum system, providing a way for them to improve their rule of law behavior ability. Carrying out rule of law education practice activities with clear themes, rich connotations, and diverse forms, not only helps to cultivate students' sense of social responsibility and mission consciousness but also helps to improve their rule of law literacy and moral cultivation.

Rule of law cultural activities on campus should be enriched. Campus cultural activities are another field of the rule of law education in college in addition to classroom teaching, and their guiding role can greatly affect the enthusiasm of students to participate in the practice of the rule of law. Colleges should hold various forms of rule of law activities to stimulate students' initiative and actively encourage and support them to participate in club activities related to the rule of law, to promote the dissemination and learning of rule of law knowledge, and provide practical services such as the popularization of rule of law knowledge and legal consultation for clubs, constantly exploring the possibility of rule of law education in student clubs.

Extracurricular social practice activities should be carried out. In modern society, the subject of education is diverse and extensive, which can provide college students with more opportunities and knowledge of rule of law education. Colleges should make full use of existing external rule-of-law education resources to establish a learning environment jointly participated by schools, judicial agencies, bar associations, and other relevant departments. It is necessary to actively engage various social forces, including local prosecution authorities, courts, and public security departments, to invite professional legal workers and researchers to lead students in experiential rule of law practice education, and to jointly organize various forms of rule of law practice activities, such as visits, training, assistance in resolving legal issues, etc.

### **4.3. Synergy of Rule of Law Education in Society, Schools, and Families**

According to the synergy law of ideological and political education elements, to improve the rule of law literacy of college students, parents, teachers, and all sectors of society are required to jointly create a rule of law education environment and realize the synergy of rule of law education in society, schools, and families.

Law-based social governance should be strengthened, as the social environment has a shaping effect on the rule of law literacy of college students.

Social legal institutions must operate by the law, promote law-based governance at the grassroots level<sup>[15]</sup>, and maintain social order through strict law enforcement and fair justice<sup>[16]</sup>. Party cadres should also actively set an example. Facing an increasingly complex social environment, every party cadre should adhere to correct values, moral standards, and rule of law spirit, and prevent events such as abuse of power for personal gain. All sectors of society should pay attention to the role of the Internet, continuously strengthen the supervision of new media on the Internet, crack down on illegal and criminal activities, spread the ideas of the rule of law, and promote social justice, fairness, and transparency, striving to establish a safe, healthy, and clean social environment.

Strengthening the rule of law in school management is crucial. The school environment is a specific spiritual and cultural atmosphere that is an important component of the social rule of law environment<sup>[17]</sup>. The operation of the school itself and the living environment of the students have a significant impact on the formation of their rule of law literacy. Schools should promote the legalization of campus management, implementing the principles of democracy, rule of law, fairness, transparency, integrity, and people-oriented thought. It should shift from a "management" model to a "service" model that is student-driven to ensure that the actions and thoughts of both faculty members and students comply with relevant laws and regulations<sup>[18]</sup>.

Family-based legal education should be strengthened, as it is a form of substantive rule of law education that not only reflects the essential content of family education but also highlights the unique position and role of family education in rule of law education<sup>[19]</sup>. Parents should set a good role models for their children by actively learning the knowledge of the rule of law and enhancing their ability to solve problems through legal means. Meanwhile, parents should pay attention to establishing a family environment that respects, studies, and abides by the law, so that children can better comply with the law in their daily lives, safeguard their legitimate interests, and fulfill their

duties correctly, to promote their comprehensive development.

## 5. Conclusion

The rule of law literacy of college students in the new era is generally good, but there are still problems: insufficient systematic mastery of the theory of the rule of law, delayed development of rule of law skills, and lack of belief in the rule of law. By strengthening and improving the “integration”, “functionalization” and “synergy” of rule of law education in families, schools, and society, the pertinence and effectiveness of college students’ rule of law literacy education can be enhanced. By improving their rule of law literacy, the construction of the rule of law in China can be better promoted.

## Acknowledgements

This study was supported by Key Projects of Social Sciences Fund of Liaoning Province (L22ADJ003), 2022.09-2023.09 .

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