



Bridging Law in Action: Transforming Students' Legal Literacy through Parepare District Court Observations

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Abstract

Background: Legal literacy in higher education often remains confined to statutory memorization, creating a gap between academic theory and the practical demands of the judiciary. This study addresses the disconnect by examining how direct court observation facilitates the transition from "law in books" to "law in action."

Objective: This research aims to investigate the transformation of legal literacy among eight Islamic family law students at STAI DDI Parepare through direct observation of a voluntary civil petition at the Parepare District Court.

Methods: Using an empirical socio-legal design with a phenomenographic orientation, data were collected through pre-observation reflections, in-court observations of a 2007 delayed death certificate case, and post-observation in-depth interviews.

Results: Thematic analysis identified six dimensions of literacy transformation, including jurisdictional shifts, evidentiary formalism, and digital court adaptation. Descriptive data indicated a mean literacy gain of +1.5 points (scale 1–5), with the most pronounced improvements in Digital Court Literacy (+1.6) and Legal Certainty Value (+1.7).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that field-based clinical legal education serves as a powerful catalyst for epistemological development. This study concludes that integrating structured court observation into the curriculum is essential for preparing students to navigate the hybrid reality of modern judiciary, where digital administration meets rigorous evidentiary formalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Legal literacy, defined as the capacity to understand, interpret, and critically apply legal norms within real-world contexts, has become a central focus in global legal education reform (Ruing et al., 2025). Globally, a significant crisis in legal education has been identified: a persistent mismatch between theoretical academic training and the practical demands of the legal profession. Data from the Global Legal Skills Conference and various international bar associations indicate that while graduates excel in doctrinal knowledge, a substantial percentage lack "practice-ready" skills, such as procedural agility and evidence management. Studies in common law and civil law jurisdictions alike from the United States to Continental Europe report that approximately 40% to 60% of junior lawyers struggle with the transition from abstract legal theory to courtroom application, a phenomenon often described as the "competency gap" (Susskind, 2023; Wintersteiger, 2020). The traditional paradigm of legal pedagogy, characterized

by doctrinal instruction and statutory memorization, has faced sustained criticism for inadequately preparing graduates for the complexities of contemporary legal practice (Wang, 2024). This global disconnect echoes the distinction between 'law in books' and 'law in action' as first theorized by Roscoe Pound, emphasizing that legal reality is often found in the courthouse rather than the classroom.

In Indonesia, this pedagogical tension is especially pronounced within Islamic higher education institutions where students are required to master both classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and modern statutory civil law. The Indonesian Civil Code regulates civil relations such as inheritance, property, and civil status (Budiman et al., 2020; Nurfadhilah et al., 2026). Procedural matters are governed by the *Herzien Inlandsch Reglement* (HIR) and the *Rechtreglement Buitengewesten* (RBg). Students at institutions like STAI DDI Parepare typically study these codes as abstract normative texts, with limited opportunities to observe their procedural application in live court settings (Cheema et al., 2026; Nasir et al., 2021). Consequently, students often possess a fragmented understanding of how substantive norms are operationalized through procedural mechanisms.

The modernization of the Indonesian judiciary through the Electronic Court System (E-Court), introduced via Supreme Court Regulation (PERMA) No. 1 of 2019 and updated by PERMA No. 7 of 2022, has added a new layer of complexity to this educational challenge. While E-Court theoretically enhances access to justice through digital registration and online summons (Ulum & Singaulung, 2023), it also creates a unique procedural paradox. As this study demonstrates, judges in civil proceedings at the Parepare District Court continue to prioritize original physical documents to establish formal truth, despite the digital administrative framework. This tension between administrative modernization and evidentiary formalism represents a critical "living law" dynamic that remains largely invisible to students confined to textual legal study. By bridging the gap through direct court observations, this research analyzes how exposure to such paradoxes transforms students' legal literacy, moving them beyond rote memorization toward a sophisticated, practice-based understanding of the law in action.

This study addresses the aforementioned academic and practical gap through an empirical socio-legal investigation of eight Islamic family law students at STAI DDI Parepare who observed a *voluntaire* (non-contentious) civil petition for a delayed death certificate at the Parepare District Court. The case served as a critical focal point for the study, involving the legalization of a death that occurred in 2007 nearly two decades prior which required a judicial decree to unlock inheritance rights and civil administrative processes otherwise blocked by the absence of an official death certificate. This specific context provided a uniquely rich laboratory for observing how students' legal literacy is transformed when theoretical knowledge of civil law norms encounters the procedural demands of real court practice. By analyzing the students' cognitive and reflective shifts during this process, the research highlights the vital role of clinical observation in bridging the divide between statutory abstraction and the functional reality of the judiciary, ultimately proposing a more integrated pedagogical framework for legal education in Indonesia.

This research situates itself at the intersection of three scholarly domains, offering a critical departure from previous studies. While (Nwedu, 2023) highlights the "humanization" of clinical legal education (CLE) in non-Western contexts, his analysis remains largely at the institutional level without deeply exploring how specific civil law paradoxes transform individual student cognition. Similarly, although (Tressyalina et al., 2026; Wiratraman, 2019) underscores the necessity of socio-legal pedagogy in Indonesia, his focus is primarily on macro-level curriculum challenges rather than the micro-level transformation of legal literacy during trial observations. Furthermore, while (Susskind, 2023) and (Ulum & Singaulung, 2023) provide essential insights into legal digitization and the E-Court system, their work tends to focus on administrative efficiency or professional readiness, often overlooking the specific evidentiary tensions that arise in *voluntaire* (non-contentious) proceedings.

This study distinguishes itself from the aforementioned literature by offering a nuanced empirical analysis of eight Islamic family law students at STAI DDI Parepare. Unlike general legal education studies, this research focuses specifically on the unique encounter between students

trained in both *fiqh* and statutory law with a two-decade-old delayed death certificate case. The novelty lies in its examination of the "evidentiary paradox" where digital modernization meets rigorous evidentiary formalism and how this specific friction serves as the primary catalyst for the transformation of legal literacy. By documenting this direct courtroom observation, the research provides a granular view of how students move beyond rote memorization to a sophisticated understanding of 'law in action,' a perspective that has been under-explored in the existing Indonesian socio-legal and CLE scholarship.

Based on the theoretical and empirical gaps identified, this study focuses on two fundamental inquiries. First, it analyzes the level of student legal literacy concerning the operationalization of substantive civil norms within the courtroom, specifically regarding the identification of case substance and the complexities of evidentiary procedures. Second, it examines the transformative process of students' understanding, moving from a static theoretical perspective (law in books) to a dynamic practical perspective (law in action) following direct trial observations. By capturing these intellectual dynamics, the research seeks to Align academic theory with the evolving reality of modern judicial practice at the Parepare District Court.

This research carries significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it enriches the socio-legal discourse on "professional identity formation" by demonstrating how exposure to procedural paradoxes such as the tension between digital E-Court administration and evidentiary formalism catalyzes higher-order legal reasoning. Practically, the findings serve as a strategic recommendation for Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI) to institutionalize courtroom observation as a mandatory clinical pedagogical tool. By bridging the gap between classroom instruction and judicial reality, this study facilitates the production of law graduates who are not only theoretically sound but also practice-ready, ultimately contributing to the long-term improvement of access to justice and professional legal standards in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed an empirical socio-legal research design, combining qualitative data collection with a structured pre/post observational framework (Chanifah et al., 2026). The socio-legal approach was appropriate because the research question concerned not merely normative legal content but also the social and cognitive processes through which legal norms were understood, applied, and transformed by human actors in institutional settings (Creutzfeldt et al., 2020; Nurfadhilah et al., 2026). Within this framework, the study adopted a phenomenographic orientation, seeking to identify qualitatively different ways in which students conceptualised and experienced their legal literacy transformation (Wright, 2025; Wright & Osman, 2018).

The study was conducted at two sites: (1) the campus of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darud Da'wah Wal-Irsyad (STAI DDI) Parepare, South Sulawesi, and (2) the Parepare District Court (Pengadilan Negeri Parepare). Eight students (n = 8) were selected through purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: (a) currently enrolled in the Islamic Family Law programme; (b) actively studying civil law in the current semester; (c) having completed at least one semester of legal theory coursework; and (d) having no prior formal experience with civil court proceedings. Participant profiles were detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Research Participants (n = 8)

Participant	Gender	Program (Semester)	Prior Theoretical Background	Pre-Observation Court Experience
Raf	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Basic BW theory; no court experience
Ah	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Familiar with family law provisions
Ab	Female	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Understood <i>KUHP</i> <i>perdata</i> theoretically
Zh	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Interested in digital legal systems
Dy	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Strong interest in legal philosophy
Ai	Female	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Knew civil evidence rules in outline
Ak	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Basic procedural law understanding
Al	Male	Islamic Family Law (II)	Islamic Law	Focus on statutory memorization

Data were collected in three sequential phases. In Phase 1, students completed a structured written reflection instrument (Self-Assessment) assessing four legal literacy dimensions: (i) normative knowledge, (ii) procedural awareness, (iii) digital court literacy, and

(iv) internalized value of legal certainty (Goyal et al., 2026; Horák et al., 2021). Each dimension was self-rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = no understanding; 5 = expert understanding). To minimize superficiality, participants were required to provide written justifications for each score based on specific legal concepts (e.g., explaining their understanding of *onrechmatige daad* or e-litigation). In Phase 2, the researcher accompanied all eight students to observe a volontaire petition hearing for a delayed death certificate at the Parepare District Court (Oppong et al., 2026). Phase 3 involved semi-structured in-depth interviews (60–90 minutes) and a post-observation self-assessment to capture perceived shifts in literacy (Adeoye et al., 2022).

Data were analysed using the interactive model comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Cheema et al., 2026; Kekez, 2019). The pre-and post-observation scores were analysed descriptively (means and delta scores) to illustrate the magnitude of perceived change. It is important to note that this study does not claim statistical significance, as the small sample size (n=8) is intended for qualitative depth rather than probabilistic generalization. Furthermore, the researchers acknowledge a significant limitation: the reliance on self-assessment data is susceptible to self-perception bias (social desirability or Dunning-Kruger effect), where participants may over- or under-estimate their actual competence. To mitigate this, interview data were used to triangulate and verify the substantive depth of the reported scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pre-Observation Legal Literacy Baseline

Prior to the court observation, all eight participants demonstrated foundational normative knowledge of civil law they could identify key provisions of the *KUHPerdata* (including Articles 830–832 on inheritance and Article 1866 on evidence) and were familiar with the general structure of the HIR. However, their understanding of how these provisions operate in live proceedings was uniformly thin. Group mean self-assessment scores were: Normative Knowledge (3.1/5.0), Procedural Awareness (2.6/5.0), Digital Court Literacy (1.9/5.0), and Legal Certainty Value (2.4/5.0). These baseline scores confirm the purposive sampling criterion: participants possessed theoretical legal knowledge but lacked practical procedural and institutional literacy.

In-Court Observation: Six Emergent Themes

Thematic analysis of post-observation interview data and observation protocols yielded six dominant themes representing the key dimensions of students' legal literacy transformation. These themes are synthesised in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis Matrix of Student Legal Literacy Transformation

Emergent Theme	Description	Representative Quote	Key Informant(s)	Theoretical Anchor
Legal Literacy Transformation	Shift from rote memorization to integrative legal reasoning	"Hafal pasal saja tidak cukup" (Al)	Zh, Al, Raf	Law in Books vs Law in Action (Pound, 1910)
Jurisdictional Awareness	Recognition of boundary between civil registry (<i>Dukcapil</i>) and judicial authority	"Harus lewat hakim jika sudah terlambat lama" (Ab)	Ab, Ah	Absolute & Relative Competence Doctrine
Evidentiary formalism	Understanding why courts demand original physical documents	"Agar hakim yakin bahwa surat tersebut asli" (Ai)	Ai, Ak	Best Evidence Rule; Art. 164 HIR; Art. 1866 BW
Digital Court Adaptation	Balancing e-court efficiency with physical document rigidity	"Harus paham teknologi" (Zh)	Zh, Raf, Al	PERMA No. 7/2022; Access to Justice
Legal Certainty Internalization	Grasping the preventive & constitutive functions of judicial decree	"Agar tidak ada masalah di kemudian hari" (Ai)	Dy, Ai, Ak	<i>Rechtssicherheit</i> (Otto, 2003); Legal Culture (Friedman, 1975)
Inheritance Law Nexus	Linking death certificate to civil property & inheritance rights	"Kepentingan administrasi keluarga" (Ah)	Ah, Ab	Art. 830 & 832 <i>KUHPerdata</i> ; Principle <i>le mort</i>

Emergent Theme	Description	Representative Quote	Key Informant(s)	Theoretical Anchor
				<i>saisit le vif</i>

Theme 1: Jurisdictional Paradigm Shift

All eight participants demonstrated a significant reconceptualisation of institutional competence boundaries following the observation: articulated the most explicit ‘juridical culture shock’: ‘Before going to court, I assumed that getting a death certificate was purely a matter for the civil registry (Dukcapil). (Interview Excerpt, December 11, 2025) I had no idea that a delayed case like this nearly twenty years would require a judge to issue a formal decree.’ This reflects the students’ prior assumption that executive and judicial functions in civil administration were interchangeable. The observation revealed the doctrine of absolute jurisdictional competence: when statutory deadlines have elapsed, administrative authority is extinguished and judicial authority is invoked.

Theme 2: Evidentiary formalism

The judge’s insistence on original physical documents rather than photocopies or digital scans provoked the deepest analytical engagement among participants noted: ‘The judge was very firm (Interview Excerpt Ai, December 11, 2025). She said copies were not enough; she needed to see the original to be certain the document was authentic and correct.’ Ak elaborated: ‘*I understand now why the court needs the physical original it’s not bureaucratic rigidity, it’s the system working to prevent fraud in documents as serious as death certificates* (Interview Excerpt Ak, December 11, 2025).’ These observations map directly onto Article 1888 *KUHPerdata* (the best evidence rule for documents) and the principle of formal truth in civil procedure. Students moved from perceiving evidentiary rules as technical obstacles to understanding them as instruments of judicial conviction.

Theme 3: Digital Court Adaptation

Zh observed E-Court registration *procedures* with particular attention: ‘*The online registration system for the petition was very smooth everything was done digitally through the court’s website* (Interview Excerpt Zh, December 11, 2025). But then inside the courtroom, the judge still required physical originals. It’s almost two different worlds: the front door is digital, but the courtroom is traditional.’ This observation encapsulates the ‘hybrid court paradox’ identified in the literature. Students recognized that future legal practitioners must be competent in both digital administrative interfaces and traditional evidentiary protocols.

Theme 4: Legal Certainty Internalization

Participants developed a nuanced appreciation of why judicial decree rather than administrative certification is required in cases of extreme delay. Dy reflected: ‘The state needs to formally recognize this death because without that recognition, the family cannot move forward not with inheritance, not with property, not with anything (Interview Excerpt Ak, December 11, 2025). The court gives certainty.’ Ai added a preventive justice dimension: ‘Without the decree, problems will follow disputes about who inherits, whether the deceased’s name can be removed from land certificates, all of this becomes difficult (Interview Excerpt Ai, December 11, 2025).’ These reflections demonstrate Internalization of *Rechtssicherheit* as a functional legal value, not merely an abstract principle.

Theme 5: Inheritance Law Nexus

Ah and Ab specifically connected the observed proceedings to inheritance rights under the *KUHPerdata*. Ah noted: ‘This is fundamentally about the family’s administrative interests about being able to process the estate, access accounts, transfer the land title (Interview Excerpt Ah, December 11, 2025).’ Ab elaborated: ‘Without the death certificate, the heirs have no legal standing. They cannot prove the death happened. The principle is that inheritance only opens at death, but if you cannot prove the death, you cannot access the inheritance (Interview Excerpt Ab, December 11, 2025).’ This reflects a sophisticated understanding of the interaction between Articles 830–832 *KUHPerdata*, the principle of *le mort saisit le vif*, and the procedural doctrine of

legal standing.

Theme 6: Epistemological Transition (Law in Books vs Law in Action)

The most philosophically significant theme was articulated most succinctly by Al: *‘Knowing the articles is not enough* (Interview Excerpt Al, December 11, 2025).’ This deceptively simple statement encapsulates the epistemological transformation observed across all participants. Zh elaborated: *‘In textbooks, we only read the theory of articles. In court, we see how the articles are actually used. The judge doesn’t just quote the law she applies it to the specific facts of this family’s situation. That application is something you cannot learn from books alone* (Interview Excerpt Zh, December 11, 2025).’ Raf contextualised this: *‘I used to think that law was about rules and their exceptions. Now I see it is about argument, evidence, and judgment under uncertainty* (Interview Excerpt Raf, December 11, 2025).’

Post-Observation Literacy Gains

Post-observation self-assessment scores revealed substantial gains across all four literacy dimensions. The most dramatic improvement was in Digital Court Literacy (+1.6 points, from 1.9 to 3.5) and Legal Certainty Value (+1.7 points, from 2.4 to 4.1), reflecting the particularly novel and impactful nature of the E-Court encounter and the judicial-decree experience. Table 3 presents individual and group mean scores, and Figure 1 visualizes the pre/post comparison across all four dimensions.

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Observation Legal Literacy Self-Assessment Scores (Scale 1–5)

No.	Partici pant	Normative Knowledge		Procedural Awareness		Digital Court Literacy		Legal Certainty Value		Δ Mean
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
1.	Raf	3	4	2	4	1	3	2	4	+1.8
2.	Ah	3	4	3	4	2	3	2	4	+1.3
3.	Ab	3	5	3	4	2	4	3	4	+1.5
4.	Zh	3	4	2	4	2	5	3	4	+1.8
5.	Dy	4	5	3	4	2	3	2	4	+1.2
6.	Ai	3	4	3	5	2	3	2	4	+1.5
7.	Ak	3	4	2	4	2	3	2	4	+1.5
8.	Al	4	5	3	4	2	4	3	5	+1.5
Group Mean		3.1	4.4	2.6	4.1	1.9	3.5	2.4	4.1	+1.6

Note. Scores are group means derived from post-observation reflective self-assessments. Pre-observation scores reflect classroom-based theoretical knowledge only. Post-observation scores reflect integrated legal literacy after court observation.

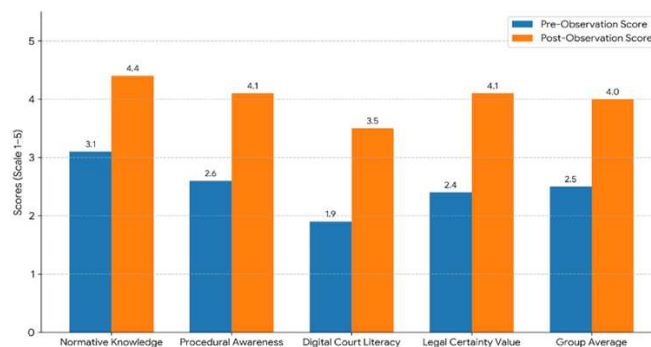


Figure 1. Pre- vs. Post-Observation Legal Literacy Scores Across Four Dimensions (n = 8, Scale 1–5)

Discussion

Legal Literacy as Epistemological Transformation

The findings confirm and extend the foundational argument that the gap between law in books and law in action is not merely descriptive but deeply consequential for legal education (Mohanta et al., 2026; Schubert, 2019). The 'juridical culture shock' observed in this study represents the exact kind of epistemological disruption that Clinical Legal Education (CLE) theorists identify as the catalyst for genuine legal literacy (Gummelt et al., 2024). This disruption was most dramatically personified by Ab, whose initial assumption that a 2007 death registration was a simple administrative matter was shattered upon witnessing the necessity of a judicial decree. Before the observation, students like Al and Raf possessed accurate but "static" normative knowledge; they could cite Article 830 of the *KUHPerdata* regarding inheritance triggers. However, the field data reveals a profound shift: after the observation, their literacy evolved into "functional" procedural knowledge. They no longer saw death as a mere abstract legal trigger but understood it as a fact that must be authenticated and judicially confirmed through a rigorous institutional process before producing legal effects.

This distinction between knowing the law and knowing how the law works Aligns with the differentiation between 'law as rule' and 'law as practice' (Van Oorschot, 2021; van Oorschot & van Balen, 2025). The concept of 'legal diagnosis' is particularly visible in the students' reflective shifts. The participants moved from a simplified diagnosis (death equals inheritance) to a complex understanding of the "procedural pathway." As recorded in the post-observation interviews, students like Ah began to articulate the full institutional chain: from the *voluntaire* petition and the submission of original documents to the formation of judicial conviction and the final issuance of a decree. This multi-step institutional reasoning, triggered by direct exposure to the Parepare District Court's proceedings, is precisely what separates sophisticated legal literacy from mere rote legal knowledge (Jiang et al., 2024). The empirical evidence from STAI DDI Parepare thus demonstrates that literacy is not "taught" in the classroom but "transformed" in the courtroom.

Evidentiary formalism and the Best Evidence Rule

The participants' engagement with the judge's demand for original physical documents reveals a pedagogically underexplored dimension of legal literacy: understanding the epistemology of judicial proof. In this study, the judge's insistence on original documents was initially perceived by students as "bureaucratic rigidity." However, the direct observation allowed them to realize that this was the operationalization of the best evidence rule (Article 1888 *KUHPerdata*; cf. Article 164 HIR), which mandates the production of original documents to ensure evidentiary integrity (Pardo, 2018; Yanto & Faidatul, 2026). The field data shows that in *voluntaire* proceedings, where the stakes include inheritance rights linked to a decades-old death, the judge's evidentiary caution is constitutive rather than merely formal. As Ai noted in her reflection, the judge's meticulousness in checking the physical seal and signature of the old documents was not a waste of time, but a necessary step to create a "reliable legal reality."

Furthermore, the observations made by Ai and Ak demonstrate a sophisticated appreciation of the relationship between evidentiary rules and judicial conviction. This experience moved them toward what psychologists call 'probabilistic reasoning under constraints.' In his interview, Ak reflected on how the absence of a single original document almost stalled the entire petition, leading him to understand that the "formal truth" standard in civil proceedings is a deliberately calibrated institutional response. The students came to see that evidentiary rigor is not an obstacle to justice, but a safeguard for it. This shift in perspective from viewing procedural rules as "red tape" to understanding them as functional justifications for judicial certainty represents a significant advance in legal literacy that doctrinal classroom instruction alone rarely achieves. The empirical evidence from the Parepare District Court thus proves that witnessing "judicial conviction" in action is more effective than merely memorizing the rules of evidence.

The Hybrid Court Paradox and Future Legal Practice

Zh's observation of the 'two different worlds' where the administrative front-end is digital via E-Court while the evidentiary core remains traditional captures a genuine structural tension in Indonesia's judicial modernization. While PERMA No. 7/2022 has successfully digitized court administration, the empirical data from this study suggests that judicial conviction (*overtuiging*) remains an irreducible human assessment. As Zh noted during the observation, although the petition was registered electronically, the "moment of truth" still depended on the judge's physical verification of the 2007 documents. This finding confirms that while processes can be digitized, the assessment of authenticity and reliability is inherently contextual and irreducible to algorithmic processing (Susskind, 2023). The field data at the Parepare District Court thus provides a concrete example of the limits of legal technology in the face of evidentiary rigor.

For future legal practitioners, this hybrid reality demands a "dual competency" that the participants began to internalize. Zh's assertive statement that "we must also understand technology" alongside his recognition that technology does not replace the need for original evidence, reflects a professionally realistic legal literacy. This shift indicates that students have moved beyond the "technological utopianism" often found in theory-only education. This finding has direct implications for legal curriculum design: without exposure to this hybrid court environment, graduates will face a "competency gap" (Abidoye, 2025). The students' ability to recognize the coexistence of digital efficiency and traditional formalism at the Parepare District Court proves that field-based clinical education is the only way to prepare students for the nuanced reality of modern legal practice.

Implications for Islamic Legal Education

The institutional context of this study an Islamic higher education institution focused on Islamic family law adds a critical dimension often neglected in Clinical Legal Education (CLE) literature. Students at STAI DDI Parepare operate at a complex intersection of two normative systems: Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Indonesian positive civil law. The court observation at the Parepare District Court brought this intersection to life. As observed in the students' collective reflections, a Muslim seeking to exercise inheritance rights under *al-fara'id* principles cannot do so in a vacuum; they must first navigate the state's procedural requirements, such as the judicially authenticated death certificate witnessed in this case. This empirical finding demonstrates that in contemporary Indonesia, Islamic law is not a standalone system but one that is operationalized through the machinery of the civil judiciary.

This study reveals a specific "literacy gap" that clinical observation effectively bridges. While students were well-versed in the substantive rules of *fiqh al-mawariith*, their post-observation interviews particularly from students like Raf and Ah indicated a sudden realization of the "institutional pathway" required to apply those rules. They witnessed that without a judicial decree, the substantive Islamic rights they studied in the classroom remain unenforceable. This direct exposure confirms that legal literacy for Islamic law students must include "procedural agility" within the national legal system. These findings strongly support the call for a more integrated curriculum (Adnan et al., 2026; Assad & Hasyim, 2020) by proving that field-based exposure is the primary catalyst for students to understand how Islamic legal values are actualized within the Indonesian state apparatus.

Comparative Pedagogical Analysis

Table 4 situates the field-based clinical approach employed in this study within a comparative analysis of legal education pedagogical models. The empirical data collected from STAI DDI Parepare students confirm the superiority of clinical exposure over purely doctrinal approaches across all assessed dimensions of legal literacy. As reflected in the "Integrative Reasoning" gain (Item 4, Table 4), students no longer merely recalled articles of the *KUHPerdata*, but could articulate their functional application. This shift was evident in Dy's ability to link the abstract theory of legal certainty with the judge's real-world decree. The findings suggest that a hybrid model incorporating both systematic doctrinal instruction and structured clinical field exposure represents the optimal configuration for transforming student cognition from passive recipients of information into active legal thinkers.

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Legal Education Pedagogical Approaches

Pedagogical Aspect	Traditional (Doctrinal)	Clinical (Field-Based)	Hybrid / Recommended
Learning Mode	Lecture-based, text-centered	Field observation, direct court exposure	Blended lecture + periodic field visits
Primary Source	Statutory codes (BW, HIR)	Live court proceedings	Codes + case-law + court visits
Assessment Focus	Rote recall of articles	Reflective analysis of procedural reality	Case analysis + reflective journal
Legal Literacy Gain	Normative knowledge only	Integrative reasoning (law in action)	Balanced theoretical & practical skills
Exposure to E-Court	None / theoretical description	Direct observation of electronic filing	Simulated e-court practice sessions
Evidence Doctrine	Abstract rule memorization	Witnessed hakim demand original documents	Moot court with actual evidence handling

The hybrid model recommended in Table 4 is consistent with the Carnegie Report's three-apprenticeship framework: cognitive, practical, and ethical-social (Abbasi et al., 2023). However, the uniqueness of this study lies in its empirical verification of this framework at the Parepare District Court. For instance, the "practical apprenticeship" was vividly observed when students witnessed the judge's interaction with the *E-Court* system, a reality Zh described as "technological necessity." Furthermore, the "ethical-social" apprenticeship was manifested in Ai's new understanding of judicial conviction as a form of public responsibility. By witnessing the judicial process in action, the eight participants successfully integrated normative knowledge with professional identity formation, proving that the Parepare court observation effectively addressed all three apprenticeships simultaneously.

Legal Certainty, Preventive Justice, and the Sociological Function of Judicial Decree

The participants' internalization of legal certainty (*Rechtssicherheit*) as a functional legal value rather than a mere abstract doctrinal concept represents the most significant dimension of legal literacy transformation in this study. This was vividly demonstrated in Dy's and Ai's reflections on the "preventive justice" function of the judicial decree. They realized that the court's decision was not just a formality for a 2007 death, but a crucial mechanism to prevent future inheritance disputes and administrative blockages for the family. As Dy articulated in his interview, the decree provides the family with a "legal shield." This empirical evidence demonstrates an evolved understanding of law as a social institution with constitutive and regulatory functions, moving beyond the static theories often cited in literature (Rooney, 2021; Rooney, 2026).

The *voluntaire* petition observed at the Parepare District Court functioned as a bridge between social fact (death as a biological event) and legal fact (death as a juridically recognized event). The students' realization that the family's status remained in "legal limbo" for nearly two decades despite the biological reality of the death, underscored the necessity of authoritative legal intervention. Witnessing the judge's decree in action provided an appreciation for the constitutive power of judicial decision-making that reading case notes alone could not provide (Gill & Hynes, 2020; Reinke & Marx, 2025). Ai specifically noted that the "legal weight" of the judge's signature transformed the family's social grief into a legally actionable status, illustrating that legal certainty requires reliable and predictable application by competent institutions.

Furthermore, the legal culture framework (Flower, 2018; Flower & Gustavsson, 2026) was illuminated through the participants' absorption of institutional rhythms at the Parepare District Court. By observing the judge, lawyers, and court staff, students did not just learn procedural rules; they absorbed professional norms and ethical expectations. Ak and Zh, for instance, remarked on the "professional aura" and the formal language used in court, which they felt reshaped their own professional identities. This cultural absorption is a crucial dimension of legal literacy development that occurred precisely because the students were physically present in the institutional environment, proving that the courtroom serves as a primary site for the socialization of future legal practitioners.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that direct court observation of a *voluntaire* civil petition serves as a catalyst for legal literacy transformation among Islamic family law students at STAI DDI Parepare. The findings reveal qualitatively rich shifts in student understanding, particularly in bridging the gap between substantive *fiqh* national law norms and their procedural implementation. Quantitative descriptive data supports these shifts, with participants reporting improved perceived competence in digital court literacy and the functional value of legal certainty. The central contribution of this research is the empirical validation of the claim that legal literacy requires more than normative knowledge; it demands integrative procedural fluency and institutional cultural competence. Consequently, this study recommends that Islamic higher education institutions systematically integrate structured court observations into their civil law curricula. Such a pedagogical shift from "law in books" to "law in action" is essential to prepare graduates for the hybrid reality of Indonesia's modern judiciary, where digital administration meets rigorous evidentiary formalism.

However, the findings of this study are subject to several limitations, primarily the small sample size of eight participants and the focus on a single non-contentious case type at the Parepare District Court, which limits the generalizability of the results. Future research should expand the scope by including a wider range of case types, such as contentious civil proceedings, and larger participant cohorts across diverse institutional settings. Furthermore, comparative studies between general and religious courts, as well as longitudinal designs to track the impact of such observations on professional practice readiness, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of legal literacy transformation. Despite its limited scale, this research provides a foundational insight into how clinical legal education can better equip future jurisdiction to navigate the complexities of the contemporary legal system in Indonesia.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Khaerunnisa contributed to the conceptualization of the study, coordination of field observation activities at the Parepare District Court, and manuscript drafting. Widia Ningsih contributed to the literature review, theoretical framework development, and data interpretation related to legal literacy transformation. Arya Nirwansyah Dwi Putra contributed to data analysis, synthesis of observational findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors collaboratively reviewed, refined, and approved the final version of the article.

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