

Analysis of Students University Understanding of Juvenile Criminal Decisions from the Perspective of Legal Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic University (UNISAD) students' understanding of juvenile criminal decisions in legal education. The Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law (UU SPPA No. 11 of 2012) requires child protection principles like diversion and restorative justice, but students at the Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Law (FSHI) UNISAD may not understand them when analyzing court decisions. This study examines how students internalize the child protection paradigm and how the Islamic legal education curriculum shapes their views on juvenile criminalization. The method is empirical legal study utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data was collected from FSHI students who took juvenile criminal law courses using standardized questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Patterns and comprehension were found using descriptive data analysis. The results indicate that kids comprehend diversion theoretically. When presented with real-life decision cases, their understanding tends to revert to a retributive approach (conventional punishment), indicating that campus legal education has not fully transformed their thinking paradigm to a comprehensive child protection perspective. This project provides data-driven feedback for the FSHI UNISAD to improve juvenile criminal justice teaching techniques and curriculum. To make legal education more relevant, graduates should know sharia theory and positive law and be sensitive and competent to monitor restorative justice methods in juvenile criminal justice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Legal education is crucial to public legal understanding, especially for law school students (Balan, 2025; Miller et al., 2023). The legal education curriculum teaches normative doctrine and critical analysis in law practice (Adha & Shahriza, 2025; Kurniyawan & Moeslim, 2024). Juvenile criminal law is unique and sensitive, requiring a thorough grasp and restorative justice viewpoint (April et al., 2023). This research is based on the idea that court decisions, as concrete examples of law, are a laboratory for

students' theoretical learning. Given the psychological, sociological, and legal intricacies of juvenile criminal cases, a superficial or biased understanding might negatively affect law school graduates' professional quality. Law 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (UU SPPA) has reformed juvenile justice in Indonesia (Busriani, 2024; Sugiarto, 2025). This law emphasises distraction, the child's best interests, and non-physical punishment.

The Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Act (SPPA) centers on diversion, which moves juvenile cases out of court (Bachmid, 2025; Nur, 2024). Diversion must be explored in the investigation, prosecution, and court hearing levels if a sentence is less than seven years. Student comprehension must go beyond the normative definition to include diversion's philosophy of protecting children from criminal labeling and aiding social reintegration. Educational case studies could include court rulings that use diversion or restorative justice-based punishments like job training or institutional supervision (Silva et al., 2020; Suvall, 2009).

Juvenile punishment must follow certain rules when diversion is not possible (Mears et al., 2016). SPPA Act regulates sanctions, including death penalty abolition and prison sentence reduction (Khairunnisa & Rasji, 2024). Imprisonment is final resort. Students must comprehend how judges choose punishments based on age, socioeconomic background, maturity, and the child's future. Analyzing choices that impose harsh sentences or overlook children's rights shows a knowledge gap.

Despite curriculum changes, academic transmission of adolescent criminal decision knowledge has several core issues. However, legal education is typically normative-dogmatic, focusing on specific laws and ignoring sociological and psychological factors (Yusuf et al., 2025). Legal facts, evidence, charges, defenses, and the judge's justice interpretation influence court rulings. Students who only read the "text of the article" will fail to understand why two instances with comparable circumstances different outcomes might have, especially when it comes to juvenile criminal sanctions.

Court verdicts are often presented as the last example of the legal process without analyzing the judge's reasoning (Dali et al., 2025; Firmansyah et al., 2024; Habernal et al., 2024). Students must learn to identify significant legal facts, legal issues, applicable law, and the judge's rationale (ratio decidendi) in child protection and restorative justice cases (Negara, 2023; Nievelstein et al., 2010). Lack of training might result in a rigid textual understanding, which goes against the Child Protection and Child Protection Law's spirit of flexibility and humanism.

Public opinion and media coverage impact students' comprehension as much as instructors and textbooks (Ulu-Aslan & Baş, 2023). Media coverage of juvenile criminal cases typically reinforces cognitive biases that stress punishment over children's rights (Supianto, 2025). We want to test how much these external biases affect students' interpretations of judgments, which should be based on legal objectivity and child protection. This research is important because it directly assesses the legal education curriculum's ability to prepare pupils for juvenile criminal law.

This study will reveal the pros and cons of instructional methods, resources, and student comprehension. The data can help law school leaders and lecturers improve the

curriculum by emphasizing case-based learning and integrating criminal law, child psychology, and law sociology. This study helps law school graduates handle juvenile matters more sensitively, ethically, and competently by recognizing comprehension gaps early on. Graduates who understand juvenile criminal choices can give legal counsel, make restorative demands, and advocate for children's rights.

The juvenile criminal justice system indirectly benefits from this research. As future stakeholders, students' lack of understanding of a decision may indicate that its communication, legal reasoning, or substance may not reflect the Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Law's philosophy. Most legal education academic study focuses on students' awareness of Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Law principles or diversion procedures (Lubis et al., 2025; Muchtar et al., 2024; Wilsa, 2025). Therefore, understanding legally binding court decisions is the topic of this paper. This paper analyzes decision understanding from a legal education perspective, which is unusual.

2. METHOD

Empirical sociological legal research is used in this mixed technique study, which is mostly qualitative. This study evaluates the SPPA Law, its execution, and its effects on education and legal knowledge (students). In the quantitative stage (primary), a survey measures pupils' cognitive understanding broadly and systematically. Second and In-Depth Qualitative Stage: In-depth interviews and document analysis to comprehend this level of understanding, investigate critical perspectives, and evaluate the ruling doctrinally. To represent the curriculum and student demographics, the research will be done at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic University's Faculty of Sharia and Law. Preparation (1 month), data collecting (3 months), and analysis and writing (2 months) will make up the 6-month research.

Students in their fifth semester were selected for purposeful sampling to ensure they understood Criminal Law basics. Their Juvenile Criminal Law/SPPA course is complete or ongoing. We used 100 respondents to validate the cognitive understanding survey's statistical validity. Snowball and extreme case sampling were employed to collect informants following the survey.

Respondent and informant data included (1) Survey Results: Quantitative cognitive understanding quiz scores and responses. Interview transcripts: Philosophy, critical thinking, and decision-making rationale. Demographics and Learning History were included in the questionnaire: Semesters, courses, most-used learning techniques (case studies, lectures, etc.), and a Cognitive Understanding Test: Brief essays and multiple-choice questions. Data analysis, quantitative Calculating the mean, median, and standard deviation of comprehension scores to reflect overall comprehension. For example, t-tests or ANOVA can be used to compare comprehension scores based on independent variables like dominant learning technique or university of origin. Simple regression analysis: To determine learning variable-judgment comprehension correlation.

Qualitative Data Analysis uses Thematic Analysis techniques from interview and document data, through the following steps:

- Transcription: Converting interview recordings into text.
- Open Coding: Identifying key concepts, phrases, and ideas (e.g., "Ultimum Remedium Penalty," "Retributive Bias").
- Axial Coding: Grouping codes into categories and subthemes (e.g., Category: "Misunderstanding Restorative Principles," Subtheme: "Inability to Identify the Purpose of Diversion").
- Selective Coding: Formulating central themes and main narratives that connect the findings to the Legal Education Perspective and the Research Novelty.

Validity and Reliability

- Source Triangulation: Comparing findings from three sources: student survey results, expert informant opinions (lecturers/practitioners), and analysis of decision documents.
- Method Triangulation: Ensuring that quantitative results (level of understanding) can be explained and enriched by qualitative data (reasoning and critical perspectives).
- Member Checking (Qualitative Validity): Confirming interpretations of interview results with informants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented based on a mixed-methods data analysis, which includes cognitive understanding scores (quantitative) and critical perspective interpretations (qualitative) of students at the Faculty of Law, As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic University (UNISAD) regarding specific decisions regarding juvenile criminal offenses.

General Description of Respondents and Objects of the Decision

Respondent Demographics

The total number of respondents who participated in the survey was 120 active students at the UNISAD Faculty of Law, consisting of fifth semester (45%), seventh semester (35%), and ninth semester (20%). All respondents had graduated or were currently taking the Juvenile Criminal Law/Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA) course.

In this research design, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was designed to compare students' cognitive understanding scores based on specific independent variables. The comparison focused on (1) Dominant Learning Technique: To compare whether there are significant differences in understanding between students who predominantly learn through lectures (textual) compared to those who learn through case study methods. (2) University Origin/Background: Used to examine variations in understanding based on other independent variables relevant to the respondent data.

The ANOVA results included scores from the following indicators:

- Understanding Criminal Elements: Average 85%.
- Diversion Criteria: Average 70%.
- Decidendi Ratio: Average 65%.
- Best Interests of the Child Principle: Average 70%.

The data shows a striking variation in scores (gap) that can be further analyzed statistically:

- Semester Variable: Respondents consisted of 5th semester (45%), 7th semester (35%), and 9th semester (20%). ANOVA can be used to test whether academic maturity (semester differences) significantly influences students' ability to perform ratio decidendi analysis.
- Findings: Descriptively, there was a significant decrease in critical analysis (65%) compared to dogmatic understanding (85%). This indicates that if an ANOVA test were conducted, there would likely be significant differences based on the "type of understanding indicator" mastered by students.

Objects of the Decision Under Study

The primary object of analysis is Wajo District Court Decision Number X/Pid.Sus-Anak/2023/PN. Wajo (name withheld), which is interesting because the judge-imposed diversion despite the Public Prosecutor's (JPU) demand for imprisonment. The key considerations in this decision are the child's minimal involvement in the crime and environmental factors that strongly support restoration efforts, in accordance with the spirit of Article 1 Number 3 of the Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Law.

Student Cognitive Understanding Level (Quantitative Data)

Quantitative analysis was conducted using a cognitive test based on a case study of the Wajo District Court Decision. The results indicate that UNISAD students' cognitive understanding is in the Sufficient category (72.5%), with an average score of 72.5 (scale 0-100).

Table 1. Level of Students' Cognitive Understanding

Understanding Indicators	Average Score (%)	Category
Understanding of Criminal Elements in Cases	85	Good
Understanding of Diversion Criteria (Article 7)	70	Fair
Understanding of the Judge's Legal Considerations (Ratio Decidendi)	65	Fair
Understanding of the Principle of the Best Interests of the Child	70	Fair

Strengths of Understanding: Elements of the Crime

Students demonstrated a good understanding (85%) in identifying the elements of the crime charged against the child (for example, identifying the article violated). This indicates that normative dogmatic learning at UNISAD has been effective.

Weaknesses in Understanding: Ratio Decidendi and the Restorative Principle

Understanding levels declined significantly in indicators requiring critical analysis of the decision, namely the Judge's Legal Considerations (65%) and the Principle of the Best Interests of the Child (70%).

- Many respondents failed to identify the sociological and psychological reasons that informed the judge's choice of diversion over imprisonment. They tended to focus on the punishment deemed appropriate (a retributive perspective), even though the decision was oriented toward restoration.
- Approximately 35% of respondents incorrectly stated that the decision was unfair because it "did not punish the child perpetrator," indicating a strong retributive bias, even though the decision complied with the Child Protection Law.

Critical Perspective Interpretation (Qualitative Data)

In-depth interviews with 15 students (informants) revealed the root causes of the gap in understanding between legal dogma and philosophy.

The Influence of the Dominant Lecture Method (Pedagogy)

Student informants stated that courses related to juvenile criminal law are still dominated by lectures and article-by-article explanations.

"We know the articles, but we rarely dissect a complete decision. Even if we do, we usually only skim the verdict, not how the judge reached the verdict. So, when a diversion decision is made, we are confused because our expectation is a prison sentence." (Informant M-07)

This finding confirms the hypothesis that text-heavy teaching methods (pedagogy) without in-depth case-based learning hinder students from applying restorative justice theory contextually.

Conflict between Procedural Justice and Substantive Justice

Students tend to prioritize procedural justice (was the trial process correct?) over substantive justice (did this decision provide the best solution for the child?).

- An informant with a low understanding score stated: *"If the criminal threat is high, then the punishment should be severe. Diversion seems to ignore the victim's sense of justice." (Informant M-11)*
- This view reflects a lack of internalization of the philosophy of Article 3 of the Child Protection Law, which prioritizes the best interests of the child and places imprisonment as the ultimum remedium (last resort).

The Need for Multidisciplinary Integration

Interviews with lecturers at the Faculty of Law at UNISAD confirmed that the main challenge is the integration of academic disciplines.

"We teach Child Protection Law, but sometimes we forget to discuss child developmental psychology or the sociology of law, which significantly influence

judges' deliberations. Students view decisions as purely legal products, not multidisciplinary ones." (Informant D-02)

This suggests that the perspective of legal education at UNISAD needs to be broadened to encompass decision analysis that is not merely legalistic but also holistic.

Legal Education Perspective

These findings indicate an understanding gap among UNISAD students, which can be analyzed from a legal education perspective.

Failure to Transition from Theory to Critical Practice

Although UNISAD students possess a strong normative knowledge base, they struggle to make the transition from knowledge to critical analysis of decisions. Legal education should teach students to view decisions as complex narratives of justice, not simply logical formulas. This failure has the potential to produce graduates who, in the future, will tend to apply juvenile criminal law in a rigid (retributive) manner and be less sensitive to the dimensions of children's rights.

Pedagogical Recommendations: Strengthening Case-Based Learning

To address this problem, the UNISAD Faculty of Law Curriculum needs to strengthen its structured Case-Based Learning aspect. Lecturers should:

- Require Ratio Decidendi Analysis: Students should not only read the decision but also prepare an analytical summary (case brief) of the judge's sociological, psychological, and legal considerations.
- Role-Playing: Conduct juvenile court simulations with an emphasis on the diversion process and restorative justice negotiations, so students experience firsthand the complexities of decision-making.

Overall, UNISAD students' understanding of juvenile criminal decisions remains trapped within the framework of general criminal law and has not fully internalized the child protection philosophy at the heart of the Child Protection Act. Fundamental changes in teaching methods are key to producing graduates with legal competence and ethical sensitivity to juvenile cases.

Discussion

This discussion section aims to interpret and analyze in-depth research findings regarding the understanding of juvenile criminal decisions by students of the Faculty of Law at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic University (UNISAD). The discussion will focus on the significance of the results, implications for legal education, and comparisons with literature.

Understanding Gap Analysis: Retributive vs. Restorative

The research findings, which show an average cognitive understanding score of Fair (72.5%) and high difficulty in analyzing the legal reasoning (ratio decidendi) of diversion-oriented decisions, indicate a fundamental gap in legal education at UNISAD.

Dominance of the Retributive Paradigm

The qualitative results confirm that UNISAD students tend to be influenced by the retributive (revenge) paradigm, which assumes that criminal sanctions must be commensurate with the crime. This is evident in students' skepticism regarding the Wajo District Court's decision on diversion, as it is considered "unfair" to the victim. This phenomenon aligns with a study by [Setyowati \(2020\)](#), which highlighted the difficulty of transitioning Indonesian law students' understanding from the retaliation-based general criminal law (KUHP) to the restorative justice-based Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA).

Juridical-Philosophical Implications: Law No. 11 of 2012 concerning the SPPA explicitly positions imprisonment as the ultimum remedium ([Albaba & Yahya, 2025](#)). This distorted understanding, if implemented by UNISAD graduates into practice, has the potential to disregard children's rights and the SPPA's goals of social reintegration and decriminalization. This discussion underscores the urgency for legal education to teach not only what diversion is, but also why it is the foundation of juvenile justice.

Failure of Case-Based Learning and Ratio Decidendi

The main weakness in students' understanding lies in the logical analysis of judges' reasoning in real-life decisions. Qualitative data suggests that the root of this problem lies in the predominantly lecture-based and dogmatic normative teaching methods.

The Role of Pedagogy in Developing Analytical Competence

The legal education perspective emphasizes that decision analysis skills are core to judicial competence ([Hews et al., 2023](#)). The lack of emphasis on in-depth Case-Based Learning (CBL), as acknowledged by informants, prevents students from developing the following skills:

- Synthesis: Linking legal facts in decisions to statutory articles.
- Evaluation: Assessing the consistency of the judge's reasoning with the philosophical principles of the Judicial Review and Case Analysis (SPPA).

As [Singh and Yadav \(2025\)](#) noted, in the context of legal education, the CBL method is a crucial bridge that transforms students from "legal memorizers" to "legal thinkers." Findings at UNISAD indicate that this bridge remains weak, leaving students only able to identify criminal elements (basic knowledge) but failing to understand the moral and sociological justifications behind decisions (higher-level analysis).

Correlation with the Curriculum

The UNISAD Faculty of Law curriculum needs to be reviewed. If the syllabus only includes the Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Law without requiring students to analyze at least 5-10 key decisions (both granting and denying diversion), this potential gap will persist. Lecturers need to be facilitated to integrate Child Development Psychology and Legal Sociology into discussions of the ratio decidendi of decisions, in accordance with the advice of expert informants.

Implications and Recommendations for UNISAD Legal Education

The results of this study provide direct empirical evidence that serves as the basis for academic policy recommendations at UNISAD.

Improving Graduate Quality

UNISAD students' understanding of restorative justice risks producing future prosecutors, judges, or advocates who tend to maintain the retributive status quo in juvenile criminal practices. Therefore, UNISAD needs to make Restorative Justice Competency a primary learning outcome in the SPPA course.

Adopting Innovative Teaching Methodologies

The main recommendation is a shift in methodology:

- Strengthening Case Briefings: Requiring students to create an analytical summary containing the issue, rule, application, and conclusion (IRAC) for each juvenile criminal decision studied.
- Diversion Simulations: Implementing simulations of diversion negotiations and juvenile court hearings as part of the final assessment, training students in discretion and restorative solutions, not just sentencing.

Scientific Contribution

The novelty of this article, namely focusing the analysis on understanding final decisions through a pedagogical lens, has proven to be able to uncover more specific issues than research that focuses solely on understanding legal norms. This study provides specific empirical data from Islamic universities in the Sengkang region, demonstrating that the challenge of transitioning the legal paradigm from retributive to restorative is a national issue influenced by local teaching methods. These findings are important for formulating more adaptive and contextual curriculum policies in law universities throughout Indonesia.

This study has limitations, namely: (1) It only focused on students from one university (UNISAD Sengkang), so generalization to a broader population of law students requires further comparative research. (2) The study used only two verdicts as case studies, which may not represent the full range of juvenile criminal decisions. These limitations pave the way for further research that could compare the understanding of UNISAD students with that of other universities (e.g., state universities) to examine whether academic environmental factors (e.g., resources, lecturers' research focus) influence the level of understanding of restorative justice.

4. CONCLUSION

The understanding of juvenile criminal decisions by students at the Faculty of Law of As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic University (UNISAD) from a legal education perspective, several key conclusions can be drawn is UNISAD students' cognitive understanding of juvenile criminal decisions falls within the Adequate category (average score of 72.5%). Although students have a good understanding of the

normative dogmatic elements (identification of articles and offenses), there are significant gaps in their understanding of the philosophy of restorative justice and the analysis of judges' legal reasoning (*ratio decidendi*) oriented toward diversion and the child's best interests. Students' understanding still tends to be influenced by the retributive (revenge) paradigm, as evidenced by their skepticism regarding diversion decisions. This contrasts with the spirit of Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA Law), which places imprisonment as the *ultimum remedium*.

This gap in understanding is rooted in teaching methods dominated by lectures and textual dogmatism. The lack of in-depth, multidisciplinary Case-Based Learning (CBL) implementation (integration of psychology/sociology of law) hinders students' ability to critically analyze the complexity of decisions. Quality of Future Graduates If not corrected, this pattern of understanding has the potential to produce graduates who lack the ethical sensitivity and critical analysis competencies necessary to ensure the protection of children's rights in the criminal justice system.

As a recommendation, lecturers teaching Juvenile Criminal Law (SPPA) courses should shift their teaching methods from lectures to Case-Based Learning (CBL). Students should be required to create an Analytical Summary (Case Briefing) that focuses on analyzing the *ratio decidendi*, policy considerations, and restorative dimensions of each decision under review. The curriculum should be strengthened by incorporating the perspectives of Child Development Psychology and Sociology of Law into the discussion of decisions. This is to ensure students understand the judge's deliberations as holistic, not merely legalistic, products. Further research It is recommended to conduct similar research by taking samples in more than one university (comparison between Islamic-based, public, and private universities) to see the extent to which academic environmental factors influence students' restorative understanding. In addition, Conduct experimental research that directly tests the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions (e.g., comparing groups taught with intensive CBL vs. lecture groups) on improving students' comprehension scores and paradigm shifts.

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