

## GENOCIDE EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH TO PREVENT CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores genocide education from the perspective of international law, with a specific focus on its application within multicultural learning environments. Grounded in community-based human rights education, the program was implemented at Sanggar Bimbingan Muhammadiyah Malaysia (SBMM), located in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. The initiative aimed to enhance awareness among elementary students and teachers regarding the legal concept of genocide, the role of international institutions, and the importance of tolerance and justice in preventing identity-based violence. Using a descriptive qualitative method through literature review and field-based observation, the program integrated international legal frameworks such as the Genocide Convention (1948), ICTY, ICTR, and the Rome Statute (1998) into interactive learning modules. Activities included narrative storytelling, visual reflection, role-play, and peace-themed projects. Results showed increased understanding of human rights, improved teacher confidence in addressing sensitive topics, and greater student empathy toward cultural differences. This study confirms that early education on genocide and international legal mechanisms can effectively promote peace values when adapted to local learning contexts. It also demonstrates that nonformal educational institutions like SBMM can serve as strategic partners in broadening legal and cultural literacy among marginalized communities. The study recommends further replication of similar programs with policy support and sustained educator training to maximize long-term impact.

**KEYWORDS:** *Genocide; International Law; Human Rights Education; Multiculturalism; Violence Prevention*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Genocide is one of the most egregious crimes against humanity, with consequences that extend beyond mass casualties to include deep social, psychological, and cultural scars for affected communities. History has recorded numerous genocide tragedies, such as the Holocaust in Europe, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia, all of which demonstrate that such atrocities can occur anywhere in the world when intolerance, discrimination, and hate speech are allowed to flourish unchecked.

Genocide is not only an act of extreme violence against a particular group, but it also reflects systemic failures in education, legal protection, and social awareness (Schweber & Findling, 2020). Therefore, cross-cultural education that introduces concepts of global justice becomes essential in the context of prevention.

In the Southeast Asian context, Malaysia is a country with a multiethnic and multicultural population. This society consists of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous communities from Sabah and Sarawak. Such diversity holds great potential as a social strength but also carries risks of identity-based conflict if not managed effectively. Racial tensions such as the May 13, 1969 incident serve as a critical reminder of the need for inclusive and anticipatory educational approaches to prevent identity-based violence (Halim & Subramaniam, 2020).

In a community engagement program conducted in collaboration with the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kampung Baru, the author found that awareness among students and teachers regarding genocide and international law was still very limited. Most teachers had not received adequate training to integrate genocide-related material into cross-curricular subjects such as history, moral studies, or civics education.

As a response to this issue, the author developed an educational initiative titled “*Genocide Education from the Perspective of International Law: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Prevent Crimes Against Humanity*” involving 30 students and 4 partner-school teachers. The program included interactive workshops, documentary film screenings, cross-cultural discussions, and training on the use of international legal case studies in classroom teaching. The school community actively participated in both the planning and reflection stages of the program.

The primary goal of this educational initiative is to increase legal literacy and cross-cultural awareness among youth, while also enhancing teachers’ capacity to address global issues through contextual and dialogic methods. Genocide education from an international law perspective serves as a foundation for preventing collective violence rooted in identity differences and for building a generation that upholds justice and universal human values.

Conceptually, this approach is supported by previous studies emphasizing the importance of integrating human rights education and conflict history into formal curricula. Research by Gross and Stevick (2019) shows that genocide education not only strengthens students' understanding of legal principles but also fosters empathy and conflict-resolution skills. In the Southeast Asian region, teacher training programs focused on multicultural and human rights content have proven effective in promoting intercultural dialogue within the classroom (Halim & Hassan, 2021).

Based on these empirical findings, this article aims to comprehensively analyze the concept of genocide under international law, the mechanisms for its enforcement, and educational approaches that can be implemented in Malaysia as a strategy for preventing identity-based violence.

## **2. METHOD**

The genocide education program from the perspective of international law was implemented as part of a community service initiative targeting the educational community at Sanggar Bimbingan Muhammadiyah Malaysia (SBMM), located in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. SBMM is a non-formal educational institution that supports children from the Indonesian migrant community in Malaysia and serves as a platform for volunteer teachers and community educators.

The main objective of the program was to enhance basic understanding of the concept of genocide, the international legal frameworks that govern it, and to instill the values of tolerance, justice, and cross-cultural awareness among students and educators. Additionally, the program aimed to strengthen teachers' capacity to integrate human rights issues and global historical themes into contextual learning activities. The program was carried out in several phases as follows:

- a) Development of educational materials: The facilitators designed a learning module based on narratives and visual content, tailored to the cognitive level of elementary school students. The module included topics such as human dignity, an introduction to genocide as a crime, and the importance of international law in protecting vulnerable groups.
- b) Program implementation: The methods used included interactive discussions, peace-themed educational games, short animated films, storytelling about genocide victims, as well as drawing and creating reflective posters. For teachers, training sessions were held on using case studies in thematic instruction.

Prior to the program, access to learning materials on international crimes was limited at the elementary level. Teachers generally lacked relevant teaching resources, and students had not yet been introduced to the concept of legal protection for marginalized groups. After the program was conducted, teachers reported greater confidence in addressing sensitive topics pedagogically, and

students demonstrated increased awareness of the importance of respecting differences and rejecting violence.

The materials were developed based on a human rights education approach that is adaptive to the local context, as recommended by UNESCO in the development of democratic citizenship and human rights curricula (Tibbits, 2019). The modules were designed not only to deliver information but also to cultivate empathy and sensitivity toward humanitarian values and tolerance.

This method draws on community-based human rights education approaches, emphasizing direct interaction with target communities and adaptation of materials based on local realities. Similar approaches have been shown to be effective in studies by Gross and Stevick (2019), as well as Halim and Hassan (2021), in raising cross-cultural awareness in non-formal education spaces.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The genocide education program conducted at Sanggar Bimbingan Muhammadiyah Malaysia (SBMM) yielded several significant findings, both in terms of participants' increased understanding and the effectiveness of the educational approaches used. The discussion in this section is based on documentation of the program process, field observations, and thematic analysis of participant responses.

#### **a. Enhancing Legal and Humanitarian Literacy**

One of the key outcomes of this program was the improvement in participants' understanding—both students and teachers—of the basic concept of genocide, how it differs from ordinary violence, and the introduction to international legal instruments such as the 1948 Genocide Convention and the 1998 Rome Statute. At the outset of the program, most participants had never heard the term “genocide” and were unaware that such crimes are governed by binding international legal frameworks.

After participating in the educational sessions, students were able to identify examples of genocide in history, recognize the importance of protecting vulnerable groups, and express values of justice through visual media, such as posters with the theme “resist identity-based violence.” Teachers also demonstrated enhanced pedagogical capacity in delivering sensitive material through narrative and reflective methods.

#### **b. Strengthening Multicultural Values and Tolerance**

During group discussions and reflective activities, students expressed an increased awareness of the importance of respecting differences and refraining from judging peers based on origin, religion, or culture. This learning method emphasized storytelling and empathy as tools to help students better understand past injustices (Zembylas, 2021).

Drawing activities and educational games revealed the internalization of values such as empathy, nonviolence, and respect for human rights. This process illustrates that participatory and creative approaches are effective in fostering cross-cultural awareness from an early age, as also affirmed by the study of Gross and Stevick (2019).

### **c. Community Participation and Engagement**

Throughout the program, the involvement of teachers, volunteer educators, and students' parents played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity and acceptance of the activities. The SBMM management committee actively supported the provision of space, scheduling, and dissemination of educational materials. Several teachers even began integrating genocide and peace topics into weekly thematic instruction.

This active participation demonstrates that non-formal educational communities like SBMM can serve as strategic partners in promoting human rights and international law education, particularly among migrant populations that typically have limited access to such content.

### **d. Challenges and Adaptation Strategies**

Some of the challenges faced included the participants' limited academic background in international law, the difficulty of simplifying legal terminology, and the students' tight learning schedules. Nevertheless, adaptive strategies such as the use of short animations, role-playing, and visual illustrations proved helpful in facilitating the understanding of complex concepts.

Teacher involvement in guiding the learning process was also a critical success factor. Through brief training sessions and facilitated discussions, teachers gained greater confidence in addressing topics traditionally considered too sensitive or "too heavy" for elementary students.

### **e. Critical Reflection and Long-Term Implications**

This program made an important contribution toward developing a contextual and culturally sensitive model of genocide education, especially for migrant communities vulnerable to informational marginalization and limited educational access. The critical reflections shared by students and teachers showed that values of humanity and justice can be instilled early through empathetic, collaborative, and visual approaches.

Human rights education in this context goes beyond delivering legal norms; it also fosters critical thinking and a culture of peace. It is a learning method that opens the door to positive transformation, particularly within communities that are often marginalized (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2023).

These findings align with the argument made by Halim and Hassan (2021) that community-based human rights education can enhance teacher capacity and expand the reach of global values within local learning spaces. In the long term, this model has the potential to be replicated in other communities with appropriate cultural adaptation and local support.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The genocide education program from the perspective of international law, implemented at Sanggar Bimbingan Muhammadiyah Malaysia (SBMM), has made a tangible contribution in raising legal awareness and promoting humanitarian values among students and educators. The use of a community-based educational approach demonstrated that complex and sensitive topics such as genocide, international law, and global justice can be effectively delivered to children and teachers within non-formal education settings (Gross & Stevick, 2019).

The alignment between the methods employed and the social context of the learners was a key factor in achieving the program's goals. The use of narrative media, visual aids, and participatory activities enabled students to better understand and reflect on values such as tolerance, nonviolence, and appreciation for cultural diversity. A study by Halim and Hassan (2021) also emphasizes that integrating human rights issues through localized approaches can enhance students' understanding and concern for universal values.

In addition, this program succeeded in building teachers' confidence to address cross-cultural and human rights issues that had previously never been included in their teaching. This reflects the potential of institutions like SBMM to serve as strategic partners in strengthening legal literacy and peace education initiatives (Sumardjo et al., 2022).

The program's impact was evident in the form of changed perceptions, improved critical thinking skills, and stronger commitments from students and teachers to act as peace agents within their communities. Furthermore, the program offers a replicable model of genocide education that is rooted in local context and culture. As Bromley and Russell (2022) argue, community-based human rights education plays a vital role in expanding critical awareness of injustice and revitalizing international legal discourse within local learning environments.

Looking ahead, programs of this kind should be further developed with the support of policy frameworks, ongoing teacher training, and the creation of accessible instructional materials. In this way, identity-based violence can be prevented early through participatory, humanistic, and values-driven educational pathways (Neville et al., 2020).

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could influence the content or outcomes of this article. There are no affiliations with any organization or third party that could result in direct or indirect benefits from the publication of this work.

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