

Humanitarian Law Education for Military Members in Preventing Violations and Building Combat Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

Humanitarian law education for military members is a fundamental pillar in efforts to build the professionalism of soldiers while preventing human rights violations during armed conflict. This study analyzes the urgency and effectiveness of humanitarian law education in the military environment, highlighting educational approaches, implementation challenges, and real impacts on the field. Departing from the assumption that a lack of understanding of humanitarian law is one of the root causes of violations that occur in war, this study presents a critical examination of training programs in several countries that have successfully implemented them systematically, such as Switzerland, Norway, and Colombia. Using a qualitative approach and literature study methods, this article constructs the argument that humanitarian law education not only instills legal norms, but also shapes the moral integrity and combat ethics of a soldier. The results of the study show that a structured, realistic, and contextual humanitarian law education program is able to significantly reduce the potential for violations. In Indonesia, humanitarian law education still faces structural and cultural challenges, such as a lack of integration in the basic military curriculum and a limited number of competent instructors. Therefore, this article recommends a comprehensive reform of the military curriculum, teacher capacity building, and strengthening post-training evaluations. Overall, this article emphasizes that humanitarian law education is an indispensable prerequisite for creating a professional, humanistic, and international standard military force. Through the formation of a strong understanding of the law since basic education, it is hoped that soldiers will be able to balance the success of combat missions with adherence to universal humanitarian values.

Keywords: International Humanitarian Law, Military Education, Combat Ethics, Human Rights Violations, Curriculum Reform

INTRODUCTION

The changing landscape of increasingly complex and dynamic global conflicts has prompted fundamental changes in the modern military approach, including in aspects of legal knowledge and the ethics of war. In this context, international humanitarian law (HHI) education for military members is a non-negotiable strategic need (Herberger, 2025; Mandel, 2011; Muzalevsky, 2017). HHIs, which are part of the international legal system, are designed to protect individuals who are not directly involved in combat as well as limit the means and means of warfare (Effendy, 2025; Rabbani, 2021; Smith, 2010). Unfortunately, in various armed conflicts, violations of humanitarian law still often occur either due to bad intentions or ignorance of perpetrators on the ground (Burk et al., 2019; Galgano & Palka, 2012; Skiba, 2024).

A lack of a deep understanding of the principles of humanitarian law can lead soldiers to act beyond legal and ethical boundaries, especially in high-pressure situations on the battlefield. This not only tarnishes the image of military institutions globally, but can also lead to serious international legal consequences (Dwiputri et al., 2025; Wagner, 2014; Wicaksono et al., 2025). Therefore, HHI education should not simply be a formality, but should be an integral part of the formation of military character and professionalism. Some countries have recognized the importance of this and are actively developing the HHI curriculum in their military education

systems. Countries such as Switzerland and Norway have successfully instilled HHI values from the early stages of soldier training, while Colombia has shown that a comprehensive approach to humanitarian law education can be a means of protracted post-internal conflict military reform (Crawford & Pert, 2024; Crowe & Weston-Scheuber, 2013; Wallace, 2013).

In Indonesia itself, despite having ratified the Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocol, the implementation of HHI education within the TNI still faces challenges. The curriculum that has not been fully integrated, the lack of experienced teachers in this field, and the lack of maximum post-training evaluation are real obstacles. This situation demands a comprehensive overhaul, both institutionally and methodologically, to ensure that every military personnel understands, internalizes, and applies the principles of HHI in every military operation carried out. This introduction serves as a basis for a deeper analysis of how humanitarian law education can shape military members' attitudes, behaviors, and adherence to international legal norms. This study also offers a strategic approach to strengthen the humanitarian law learning system in Indonesian military institutions (Solis, 2021).

In understanding the importance of humanitarian law education for military members, a solid theoretical foundation is needed so that every analysis and recommendation in this study has a strong scientific footing. The concepts and theories used aim not only to explain the normative basis of humanitarian law, but also to illustrate how those norms can be effectively internalized through targeted military education. In this context, there are five main concepts and theories that are important references in building a comprehensive and applicable analytical framework (Indonesia., 2025; Sassòli, 2019).

The concept of International Humanitarian Law (HHI) is the main basis in this study. HHI is a branch of international law that regulates conduct in armed conflict, with the primary purpose of protecting those who do not take part in hostilities and limiting the means and tools used in war. HHI includes the 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, which emphasize important principles such as the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, proportionality in the use of force, as well as the prohibition of methods of combat that cause unnecessary suffering. This concept is the core material in humanitarian law education and is a moral and legal benchmark in any military operation (Dinstein, 2016). Therefore, a thorough understanding of these norms is an absolute requirement for any soldier who will be involved in an armed conflict. Compliance *Theory* is very relevant to explain the extent to which individuals or institutions, especially the military, comply with the rule of law in practice. This theory underlines that compliance does not occur solely because of sanctions, but rather the internalization of legal norms formed through the process of education, training, and habituation. In the military context, if the norms of humanitarian law have been embedded from an early age in the spirit and behavior of soldiers, then the possibility of violations of the law can be significantly suppressed. Therefore, humanitarian law education should not stop at the cognitive aspect, but should touch the affective and behavioral domain. The study also uses the concept of *Combat Ethics* as part of a more humanistic approach to military education. Combat ethics focuses on the moral principles that soldiers must be guided by when facing dilemmas on the battlefield. Not all conditions of war can be responded to with rigid standards of procedure; In many cases, moral wisdom and mature ethical considerations are required. Combat ethics teaches the importance of protecting civilians, treating prisoners of war with dignity, and avoiding excessive use of force. If these values are instilled in humanitarian law education, then soldiers will have a strong moral compass in dealing with complex situations in the field. The *Transformational Learning Theory* developed by Jack Mezirow is also used. This theory emphasizes that the ideal education is an education that is able to profoundly change the way of view, mindset, and behavior of students. Within the framework of humanitarian law education, this theory encourages that training is not only technical-informative, but also capable of forming a soldier's critical awareness of the reality of conflict

and his moral responsibility. This transformation is very important, because only with a comprehensive paradigm shift can soldiers act in accordance with humanitarian principles, even in the midst of heavy operational pressures.

This study is based on the Concept of Military Professionalism, which is the principle that a true soldier not only masters combat skills and military strategy, but also submits to a code of ethics, legal discipline, and loyalty to universal values. Military professionalism includes a commitment to the rule of law, including humanitarian law. In this context, humanitarian law education should be seen as an integral part of the military professionalization process. A professional military is one that is not only capable of winning battles, but also capable of conducting them in a legitimate, civilized, and honorable manner. These concepts and theories do not stand alone, but are interrelated and reinforce each other in forming a framework of thinking on the urgency of humanities law education. The understanding and application of these concepts holistically in military education will be a solid foundation for the realization of a defense force that is professional, legal, and oriented towards the protection of universal human values.

METHOD

This research was prepared using a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to describe, understand, and analyze in depth the implementation of international humanitarian law (HHI) education in the military environment, especially as an effort to prevent human rights violations and form the character of professional and law-abiding soldiers. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the characteristics of exploratory and interpretive research on complex social, cultural, and normative phenomena in military institutions.

The method used is *library research*, which is carried out by examining various documents, scientific literature, legal and military theory books, academic journal articles, national defense policy, and official documents of international institutions such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations, as well as national laws and regulations such as Law Number 34 of 2004 concerning the TNI and its implementing regulations. This literature search was carried out systematically to obtain relevant and credible secondary data to support the analysis of the topic studied. In addition, this study also utilizes secondary empirical data from the results of previous research, reports on humanitarian law training activities in several countries, and documentation of the implementation of HHI in the military education curriculum in Indonesia and internationally. This data is essential to see how educational and legal theories can be implemented in a military environment that has a distinctive and hierarchical organizational structure and culture.

In the data analysis process, the researcher uses content *analysis* techniques that aim to identify patterns, meanings, and important themes in the analyzed text. This analysis is carried out thematically by comparing the theory with the empirical reality obtained from data sources. Each finding was analyzed with reference to a pre-compiled theoretical framework, especially related to the concept of HHI, combat ethics, legal compliance, and military professionalism. To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, a source triangulation approach is used, namely by comparing and confirming information from different types of documents and different authors' perspectives. For example, data from national military agencies are compared with reports from international agencies such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International to get a complete and objective picture. The data selection criteria in this study refer to the relevance, reliability, and up-to-date of the source. Only sources that are considered to have academic and institutional authority are used as analytical material, such as publications from universities, military think tanks, and internationally recognized organizations. These sources are not only chosen to strengthen the argument, but also to maintain the academic integrity of the research.

The scope of the study is limited to humanitarian law education programs at the basic and secondary military education levels, especially in educational institutions such as the TNI Academy, Sesko Matra, and Sesko TNI. The focus of the study is directed at the content of the curriculum, the method of delivering the material, the qualifications of the instructor, and the evaluation model applied. In addition, for comparison, case studies of HHI implementation in Switzerland, Norway, and Colombia were used to provide an international context and look at best *practices* that can be adapted into the Indonesian military education system.

With this method, it is hoped that the study prepared will be able to provide a sharp, relevant, and data-based analysis, and can be a strong basis for argumentation in formulating policy recommendations and developing a more effective humanitarian law education curriculum in the national military environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals a number of crucial findings in looking at the actual conditions, effectiveness, challenges, and impacts of the implementation of International Humanitarian Law (HHI) education in the military environment. Based on literature reviews, reviews of official documents, and practical analysis from countries that have implemented HHI education in a structured manner, it is understood that the success of humanitarian law education is highly determined by three main factors: curriculum quality, teacher competence, and value internalization systems in military institutions (Alsharari, 2020; Atkinson, 2014; Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013).

At the global level, developed countries such as Switzerland, Norway, and Colombia are important references in successfully implementing HHI education in a systemic and sustainable manner. In Switzerland, HHI has been an integral part of all levels of military education since the recruitment stage. Legal material is taught not only theoretically, but through a conflict simulation-based approach, real-life case discussion, and training by presenting scenarios of ethical dilemmas on the battlefield. This not only enhances the soldier's technical understanding of humanitarian law, but also establishes a reflective attitude, moral responsibility, and high legal awareness in any tactical decision-making. In Norway, HHI is combined with military ethics and operational leadership training, which results in a synergistic combination of legal acumen and ethical courage, especially in the context of multinational operations or UN peacekeeping missions. As for Colombia, which has a long history of internal armed conflict, it has succeeded in making HHI education part of post-peace military reforms. Colombia is leveraging cooperation with the ICRC and international human rights agencies to develop a contextual curriculum that is relevant to real threats on the ground. As a result, Colombian forces showed a significant decrease in cases of human rights violations, as well as an increasing level of public trust in the military as a professional and humanist actor. In contrast to these countries, the implementation of HHI education in Indonesia still faces various structural and cultural obstacles.

Although Indonesia has ratified the 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, and has normative commitments in the form of the TNI Law and other implementing regulations, in practice, humanitarian law education has not been a systemically integrated part of all levels of military education. In some educational institutions such as Akmil, AAU, and AAL, humanitarian law material is generally placed as a small part of law or human rights courses, delivered in the form of one-way lectures, without using an interactive or experiential approach. Legal material is often separated from the operational context, thus failing to establish a connection between legal norms and real challenges in the field. Furthermore, the quality of teaching staff is a significant weak point. The majority of law teachers in military educational institutions come from purely academic backgrounds, with no tactical or operational experience in the battlefield of conflict. This causes the delivery of legal material

to be rigid, normative, and unable to answer the psychological and moral dynamics faced by soldiers in the field. The absence of pedagogical training for law teachers is also an inhibiting factor in making HHI material as a tool for character building. On the other hand, the evaluation of the understanding of humanitarian law by military students is also weak. There is no standardized grading system that measures the extent to which students truly internalize humanitarian values and principles of international law after undergoing training. Evaluations are more administrative and are not able to detect the ethical-situational readiness of a soldier when facing operational dilemmas.

However, there are positive indications from several units and programs that have established cooperation with international organizations such as the ICRC. In the joint training program held on a regular basis, especially at the intermediate and senior officer levels, it was found that participants showed improvements in knowledge, legal sensitivity, and tactical decision-making ability that was in line with the principles of HHI. Some elite units such as Kopassus, Marines, and Paskhas have even begun to adopt internal SOPs that reinforce the principle of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, as well as the proportionate use of force. However, this good practice is still partial and has not become a national standard in all TNI units.

This study also notes that the absence of a center for humanitarian law studies within the TNI is a strategic obstacle in developing a scientific base and sustainable teaching methodology. Amid demands for defense reform that emphasizes accountability and professionalism, the need for military humanitarian law research and training institutions is becoming increasingly urgent. Without a permanent institution that addresses this issue comprehensively, efforts to build legal understanding among the military will continue to be fragmentary. From all these findings, it can be concluded that humanitarian law education has a direct influence on the quality of combat behavior, legal discipline, and legitimacy of military operations. Countries that have systematically integrated this education have proven to be able to create armed forces that are more professional, humane, and responsive to international criticism. In Indonesia, there is still a lot of room to improve and expand the HHI education system through curriculum improvement, instructor training, and the development of stronger and more sustainable evaluation and supervision mechanisms.

International humanitarian law (HHI) education in the military environment is not only a complement to the defense education curriculum, but has become a national and international strategic need regarding the credibility, professionalism, and legitimacy of the armed forces in the eyes of the law and the global community. Based on the findings of the previous findings, there are a number of fundamental issues that need to be analyzed more deeply: structural and institutional limitations in HHI education in Indonesia, the relevance of learning approaches to combat contexts, the urgency of strengthening teaching staff, and the strategic role of humanitarian law education in preventing human rights violations and strengthening the moral position of the Indonesian military in various operations, both at home and abroad.

First of all, it should be emphasized that the lack of integration of HHI education in the Indonesian military education curriculum is a consequence of the lack of strategic attention to non-militaristic aspects in personnel training. Over the years, military education has tended to focus on physical strengthening, discipline, combat ability, and tactical doctrine, but has left aside the legal and ethical dimensions as fundamental pillars in shaping the character of the modern soldier. In fact, in the dynamics of contemporary warfare, soldiers are no longer only faced with armed opponents, but also with international media surveillance, human rights organization intervention, and high moral pressure in dealing with civilians, refugees, and vulnerable groups. Failure to understand humanitarian law can lead to wrong decisions, lead to violations, and even exacerbate the escalation of conflicts and damage the military's overall reputation. In this context, the method of delivering HHI education is also an important

highlight. Most legal training in Indonesian military institutions still uses a normative-doctrinal approach, which emphasizes memorization of legal articles without touching on contextual aspects and practical dilemmas in the field. This model is certainly not effective in forming the ethical resilience and legal awareness of soldiers who will go directly into the field of operations. In the best practices of countries such as Switzerland and Norway, humanitarian law education is delivered through simulation-based approaches, real-life case discussions, and scenario training that allows participants to understand the real impact of any legal action or violation on the battlefield. This approach is more in line with the character of the military who is accustomed to hands-on practice-based training methods. Another thing that is also in the spotlight is the low capacity and competence of humanitarian law instructors in military educational institutions. Many teachers come from academic circles who lack an understanding of the tactical and psychological dynamics of military operations, while on the other hand, military instructors who have operational experience lack training in legal aspects. This creates inequities in the delivery of the material: too theoretical for soldiers who need practical clarity, and too general for the context of operations fraught with moral and legal dilemmas. Therefore, it is important to make efforts to form joint instructors from the military and legal academic circles, as well as provide special training to them to be able to deliver legal material with a realistic and grounded approach. Furthermore, humanitarian law education is not only important in the internal context of military education, but also has external strategic impacts, particularly in international military operations and defense diplomacy. In UN peacekeeping missions, for example, Indonesian military personnel who do not understand the principles of HHI will have difficulty adapting to strict international standards. Failure to apply the principles of non-discrimination, proportionality, and protection of the civilian population can be fatal, both for the mission itself and for Indonesia's reputation as a contributing country to peacekeeping forces. Therefore, strengthening HHI education nationally is also a diplomatic and reputational investment that should not be ignored by defense policy makers.

In addition, the implementation of humanitarian law education is also closely related to the prevention of human rights violations in the country. In non-war military operations (OMSP), such as operations to secure conflict-prone areas, countering terrorism, or handling social unrest, soldiers are often faced with gray situations that are not regulated in detail in military doctrine. Under such conditions, a deep understanding of the principles of humanitarian law will become a moral and legal compass that helps soldiers to act appropriately and proportionately. Many cases of violations in the past actually occurred not because of malicious intent, but because of ignorance and lack of legal guidance, especially among non-commissioned officers and enlisted men. On the other hand, structured HHI education has also been proven to increase soldiers' loyalty to institutions, as it fosters a sense of pride as part of a professional and civilized military force. A soldier who is trained not only to be a combat machine, but also as a guardian of human values, will have a higher awareness of his responsibilities to the nation, the people, and the international world. This also answers the challenges of the times, where military strength is measured not only by combat capability, but also by its ability to adapt to global norms and be responsive to the public spotlight. Therefore, this discussion emphasizes that Indonesia's military education reform must prioritize the integration of humanitarian law as a whole, starting from strengthening the curriculum, establishing HHI study centers in military institutions, improving instructor training, to adjusting the performance and field situation evaluation system. These measures are important to ensure that every Indonesian soldier, from the beginning of his education, has understood that even war has its limits, and that the armed forces must always operate within the framework of law and humanitarian values.

By building a strong and sustainable system of humanitarian law education, Indonesia will be able to create a military posture that is not only resilient in the face of threats, but also morally superior and respected by the international community.

CONCLUSION

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) education is a critical necessity in modern military training, shaping soldiers who are not only tactically proficient but also morally and legally conscious. While countries like Switzerland, Norway, and Colombia have successfully integrated IHL education—reducing violations and fostering a law-abiding military culture—Indonesia faces challenges such as weak curriculum integration, insufficient instructor expertise, and a lack of practical training. To bridge this gap, comprehensive reforms are needed, including contextual learning methods, skilled instructors with legal and operational experience, and stronger collaboration with international organizations like the ICRC. Future research should compare Indonesia's IHL education with best-practice nations, focusing on curriculum design, practical training effectiveness, instructor development, and measurable operational impacts. Such studies will help transform IHL education from a theoretical obligation into a vital operational standard, ensuring military legitimacy in an era where legal and ethical accountability is paramount.

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