

Criteria, Indicators And Levels Of Development Of Legal Consciousness Among Preschool Education Directors

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a diagnostic framework for assessing the development of legal consciousness among directors of preschool education organizations. Three interrelated criteria are identified: cognitive, value-motivational, and behavioral-activity. Each criterion is operationalized through observable indicators, including knowledge of legal norms, interpretation of regulatory requirements, awareness of children's and employees' rights, commitment to legality, responsibility for decisions, conflict-resolution behavior, documentation practices, and lawful administrative action. On this basis, three integrated levels—low, medium and high—are described. The proposed framework can be used to design diagnostic instruments, professional-development programmes, case-based learning, reflective activities and competency-oriented assessment for preschool directors. The approach is consistent with contemporary international emphasis on rights-based early childhood education, professionalization of educational leadership, accountability, participation and evidence-informed governance.

Keywords: Legal consciousness, legal competence, preschool education, educational leadership, preschool director, legal culture, criteria, indicators, diagnostic levels, professional development, children's rights, educational governance.

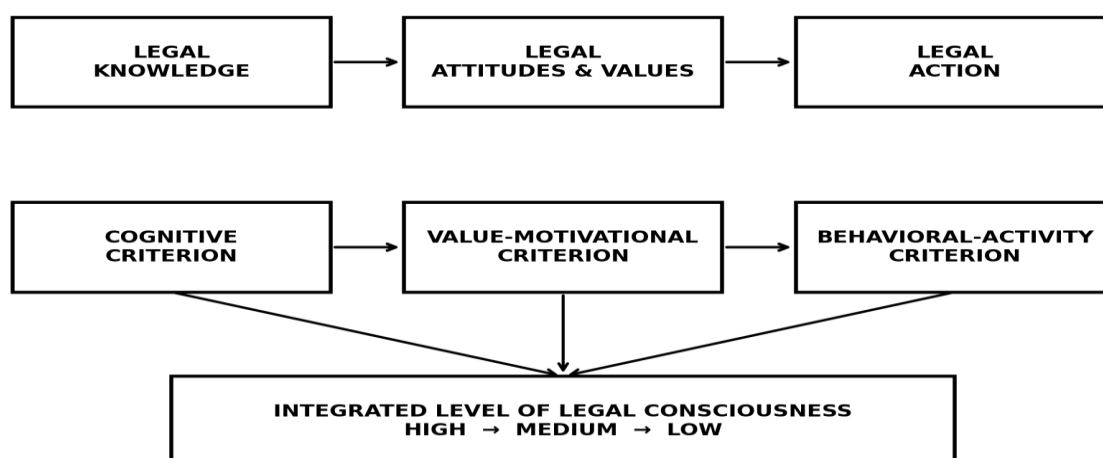
INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of preschool education management increasingly depends not only on administrative and pedagogical competence, but also on the ability of directors to understand, interpret and apply legal norms in everyday professional decision-making. Legal consciousness in this context is understood as an integrated professional quality that combines knowledge of educational legislation, awareness of rights and responsibilities, value-based attitudes toward legality and human rights, and the ability to act lawfully in complex organizational situations. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is increasingly treated as a rights-based component of education systems rather than only as a preparatory stage before primary school. UNESCO notes that the right to early childhood care and education is receiving growing attention and that stronger national and international legal frameworks are needed to guarantee its implementation. The international agenda connected with Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 also places quality, equity and access to early childhood education at the centre of educational policy. In this context, the director of a preschool education organization occupies a position in which legal requirements are translated into institutional practice. Decisions concerning admission, children's safety, staff employment, professional duties, parental interaction, documentation, data protection, inclusion, disciplinary procedures, resource management and accountability all have a legal dimension. Consequently, a director's legal consciousness cannot

be reduced to memorizing legislation. It should be understood as the capacity to recognize a legally relevant situation, identify applicable norms, interpret them appropriately, consider the rights and legitimate interests of participants, make a justified decision, document it correctly and accept responsibility for its consequences.

Legal consciousness may be interpreted as a system of knowledge, representations, values, attitudes and behavioral orientations through which an individual perceives law and regulates conduct in legally significant situations. In professional education management, this construct acquires a specialized character because the leader simultaneously acts as an organizational decision-maker, employer, educator, representative of the institution and guarantor of a safe and rights-respecting environment. A rights-based approach is particularly important in preschool education because the primary beneficiaries are young children whose interests must be protected by adults and institutions. UNESCO's work on the evolving right to education emphasizes that ECCE contributes to equality, school readiness and social equity and that legal provisions should be translated into effective implementation. The professional component is equally significant. Based on these principles, legal consciousness is operationalized in this thesis through three dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns what the director knows and how accurately the director understands and interprets legal norms. The value-motivational dimension concerns why the director follows legal norms and how strongly legality, justice, children's best interests, professional responsibility and respect for human dignity are internalized. The behavioral-activity dimension concerns how legal knowledge and values are translated into concrete administrative actions, communication, documentation, conflict resolution and decision-making.

Proposed diagnostic architecture for preschool directors' legal consciousness



Proposed diagnostic architecture of legal consciousness among preschool directors.

The first criterion is cognitive. It reflects the director's ability to identify relevant legal sources, understand key concepts and interpret norms in relation to real managerial situations. Important indicators include knowledge of legislation governing preschool education, awareness of the rights and responsibilities of children, parents and employees, understanding of institutional authority and limits of discretion, ability to distinguish mandatory and optional requirements, and ability to locate and verify current legal information.

The second criterion is value-motivational. Legal consciousness becomes professionally meaningful only when legal norms are internalized as values rather than followed solely

because of external control. Indicators therefore include respect for children's dignity and best interests, commitment to equality and non-discrimination, perception of legality as a professional value, personal responsibility for managerial decisions, intolerance of corruption and arbitrary treatment, readiness to protect legitimate rights, and motivation for continuous legal self-education.

The third criterion is behavioral-activity. This criterion captures observable professional conduct. It includes the ability to make lawful decisions, maintain required documentation, apply procedures consistently, respond appropriately to complaints, resolve conflicts through lawful and ethical mechanisms, protect confidential information, consult competent authorities when necessary, and use evidence and legal sources when making managerial decisions.

The three criteria should not be treated as independent scales only. High legal consciousness requires their integration. A director may possess extensive legal knowledge but demonstrate weak legal consciousness if that knowledge is not reflected in fair and lawful conduct. Conversely, good intentions without sufficient legal knowledge can also result in inappropriate decisions. Therefore, the diagnostic model should examine the coherence between knowledge, values and action.

Criterion	Core content	Key indicators	Possible evidence
Cognitive	Understanding and interpretation of law	Legal knowledge; source identification; norm interpretation; awareness of rights/duties; understanding of authority limits	Knowledge test; case analysis; legal-source task
Value-motivational	Internalization of legality and rights-based values	Respect for dignity; child-centredness; fairness; responsibility; anti-corruption orientation; motivation for legal learning	Likert scale; situational judgement; reflective questionnaire
Behavioral-activity	Application of law in professional action	Lawful decisions; documentation; complaint handling; conflict resolution; confidentiality; consultation; procedural compliance	Observation; case performance; document analysis; expert rating

Table 1. Proposed criteria and indicators for assessing legal consciousness.

For practical assessment, each broad criterion can be decomposed into measurable indicators. A four-point scoring system may be used: 0 = not demonstrated, 1 = emerging, 2 = sufficiently demonstrated, and 3 = consistently demonstrated. If a five-point scale is preferred, the same indicators can be transformed without changing the conceptual structure. The important requirement is that scoring descriptors should be behaviorally anchored and supported by evidence.

Dimension	Indicator	Low manifestation	Medium manifestation	High manifestation
Cognitive	Knowledge of legislation	Knows isolated provisions; frequent confusion	Knows major norms; occasional gaps	Systematically knows and updates relevant norms

Cognitive	Interpretation of norms	Applies mechanically or incorrectly	Interprets common cases adequately	Explains context, hierarchy and limits of norms
Cognitive	Rights awareness	Limited awareness of participants' rights	Recognizes main rights	Consistently integrates rights into decisions
Value-motivational	Commitment to legality	Follows rules mainly under control	Usually values compliance	Treats legality as an internal professional principle
Value-motivational	Responsibility	Avoids responsibility or externalizes blame	Accepts responsibility in routine cases	Anticipates consequences and accepts responsibility
Value-motivational	Fairness and dignity	Inconsistent treatment	Generally respectful	Systematically protects dignity and equality
Behavioral	Lawful decision-making	Decisions may contradict procedures	Usually follows procedures	Makes transparent, justified and lawful decisions
Behavioral	Documentation	Incomplete or delayed documentation	Basic requirements met	Accurate, timely and traceable documentation
Behavioral	Conflict resolution	Personal or arbitrary approach	Uses standard procedures	Uses lawful, restorative and evidence-based procedures
Behavioral	Continuous legal learning	Rarely updates knowledge	Participates when required	Regularly self-updates and shares knowledge

Table 2. Behavioral anchors for the proposed indicators.

The integrated level should be determined not by one indicator but by the pattern of results across all three criteria. A high level represents a mature professional legal consciousness in which knowledge, values and behavior reinforce one another. A medium level indicates functional legal competence with some gaps, inconsistencies or dependence on external guidance. A low level indicates fragmented knowledge, weak internalization of legal values and frequent difficulties in translating requirements into lawful professional action.

Level	Cognitive profile	Value-motivational profile	Behavioral profile	General characteristic
High	Systematic, accurate, current	Strong internal commitment to legality and rights	Consistent, transparent, justified action	Autonomous legal-professional leadership
Medium	Basic and generally adequate; some gaps	Positive orientation but partly situational	Generally compliant; needs support in complex cases	Functional but developing legal consciousness



Low	Fragmented, outdated or inaccurate	Weak internalization; compliance mainly external	Inconsistent or procedurally weak action	Insufficient legal- professional readiness
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Table 3. Integrated levels of legal consciousness.

A possible quantitative approach is to calculate an integrated index by averaging standardized scores for the three criteria. For example: Legal Consciousness Index (LCI) = (Cognitive + Value-Motivational + Behavioral-Activity) / 3. If each criterion is scored on a 0–3 scale, the following provisional interpretation can be used for pilot research: 0.00–0.99 = low; 1.00–1.99 = medium; 2.00–3.00 = high. These cut-offs are methodological proposals and should be empirically validated rather than presented as established norms. For research reliability, the instrument should be piloted with a sufficiently diverse sample of preschool directors. Internal consistency can be examined using Cronbach's alpha, while expert agreement can be evaluated through appropriate measures of inter-rater reliability. Construct validity may be investigated using exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis after an adequate sample is obtained. Correlations between the criteria can also be tested to determine whether the proposed three-dimensional structure is empirically supported.

The criteria and levels proposed here have direct implications for professional development. If the dominant problem is cognitive, programmes should emphasize legal updating, guided analysis of legislation, comparison of norms, legal-source literacy and practical interpretation. If the main weakness is value-motivational, reflective discussions, ethical dilemmas, rights-based cases and professional responsibility tasks become more appropriate. If behavioral weaknesses dominate, training should focus on simulations, case management, document preparation, complaint handling and supervised decision-making.

Case-based learning is especially suitable because legal consciousness develops through the interpretation of concrete situations. A training module may present a conflict between a parent's request and a child's best interests, a staff disciplinary issue, a data-protection dilemma, or an emergency requiring immediate action. Participants should identify the relevant rights and duties, locate applicable norms, generate alternative decisions, predict consequences and justify the final action.

Reflective practice can strengthen the connection between legal knowledge and professional identity. After a case, directors may complete a short “legal reflection cycle”: What was the legal issue? Which rights were involved? Which sources did I rely on? What alternatives existed? Why was the decision lawful and fair? What would I change in a similar case? This process encourages metacognitive monitoring of professional decisions. Digital legal literacy should also be included. Directors need the ability to locate current legislation, verify whether a document remains in force, distinguish official legal sources from informal summaries, and keep track of amendments. This is particularly important because legislation changes over time. In Uzbekistan, the current version of the preschool education law already reflects multiple amendments, including changes recorded in 2026.

The proposed framework makes it possible to distinguish three concepts that are often used interchangeably: legal literacy, legal competence and legal consciousness. Legal literacy primarily refers to the ability to access and understand legal information. Legal competence is broader and includes the capacity to apply relevant norms to professional tasks. Legal

consciousness is the most integrated construct because it includes not only knowledge and competence but also attitudes, values, responsibility and stable behavioral orientations. This distinction is important for preschool directors. A leader may pass a legal knowledge test but still make arbitrary decisions in emotionally difficult or organizationally complex situations. Therefore, the assessment of legal consciousness should include authentic or simulated behavior. The proposed three-criterion framework provides a bridge between normative knowledge and professional action. The framework also supports differentiated professional development. Directors with high cognitive but lower behavioral scores need opportunities for practice rather than additional theoretical lectures. Directors with adequate behavior but weak knowledge require systematic legal updating. Those with knowledge and skills but weak value orientation may benefit from ethical reflection and rights-based leadership cases. Thus, the diagnostic profile can become the basis for individualized professional trajectories.

The legal consciousness of preschool education directors is a multidimensional professional phenomenon that integrates legal knowledge, value-based orientation and lawful managerial behavior. Its assessment therefore requires more than a traditional knowledge test. The proposed framework identifies three criteria—cognitive, value-motivational and behavioral-activity—and specifies observable indicators for each.

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