

Criminal Justice Education: A Focus for Gen Z

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Today's generation, the Gen Z, lives in a time when justice-related issues are often discussed online as supported by Bermal et al. (2022). From viral videos to heated social debates, many young Filipinos speak out about what is wrong in society. But while their awareness is growing, there is still a gap when it comes to deep understanding of how justice works in real life. That's why there's a need to bring criminal justice education closer to the youth, not just for those studying criminology or law, but for all students.

Among young people, violence is often used as a tool to gain self-esteem when they are exposed to adversities (Costello, 2021). This is often seen among people who are forced to live under impoverished circumstances (Mcara & Mcvie, 2016). The fact is, many young people know what is unfair, but few understand the justice system's structure. They might not know how cases are handled, what rights individuals have, or what laws protect the vulnerable. If we want future leaders and citizens who are not only active but also well-informed, we need to educate them early. Balanon et al. (2007) noted that practical step is to include basic criminal justice topics in senior high school or general education courses in college. Lessons can cover key areas such as rights of individuals, juvenile justice, cybercrime, and the role of police and courts. These should be explained in simple terms, with real-life examples that students can relate to.

In 2023, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) reported that more than 67,000 students nationwide were enrolled in criminology and law enforcement-related courses. This supports that there is growing interest among Gen Z to understand public safety and legal systems. However, a report by the Philippine National Police Academy (PNPA) found that many of these students still feel unprepared to face real-world justice challenges because their education is mostly classroom-based. This serve as an eye-opener about the need for practical and experience-based learning inside and outside schools. To help address this, DepEd launched a "Peace and Order Literacy Initiative" in early 2024 to promote law-related education in senior high

schools across the country. The program aims to help students understand the role of laws, law enforcers, and citizens in keeping peace. It encourages schools to hold workshops and interactive sessions that teach legal concepts in simple, relatable ways. With this initiative, the government hopes to build a stronger foundation for young people to become justice advocates in their communities.

Beyond textbooks, schools can organize forums, invite legal professionals as guest speakers, or hold school-wide campaigns that promote justice awareness. Student organizations and clubs can also play a role by leading discussions, community visits, or volunteer activities related to justice issues. For public and private schools alike, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) can help by creating youth-friendly modules and training teachers. NGOs and law schools can also offer support by running workshops or sharing resources with schools. Using social media as a learning tool is another way to connect with Gen Z. Short videos, explainers, and digital storytelling can make legal education more engaging and easier to understand.

The goal is not just to create future lawyers or police officers, it's to shape a generation that values fairness, respects rights, and knows how the system works. Education gives Gen Z not just a voice, but also the tools to use it wisely. Criminal justice education empowers young people to go beyond complaints and become part of the solution. Teaching them early, we raise a generation that can bring justice not only in words but in action.

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