

Original Paper

Current Situation and Improvement Strategies of Law and Regulatory Awareness among Young College Teachers in China

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Received: August 22, 2025 Accepted: October 29, 2025 Online Published: November 21, 2025
doi:10.22158/assc.v7n6p86 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v7n6p86>

Abstract

The rule of law is the cornerstone of modern social governance, the guarantee of the rights and interests of social members, and a powerful guiding and restricting tool for social activities. The prosperity of a society is inseparable from a complete and fair legal system and everyone's conscious awareness of abiding by the law. Colleges and universities are places where students are taught advanced professional knowledge and at the same time improve their moral level and legal awareness. Young college teachers are the ones who directly teach students knowledge, answer professional questions and life confusions, and popularize legal knowledge. Therefore, young college teachers have a strong awareness of laws and regulations. Under the guidance of teachers, students' awareness of laws and regulations is comprehensively improved, and they consciously abide by laws and regulations. Based on previous research, this article adds the psychological motivations of young college teachers to analyze the reasons for the weak legal awareness of college teachers, and proposes corresponding strategies.

Keywords

Young college teachers, Legal and regulatory awareness, Improving legal and regulatory awareness

1.Introduction

Teachers serve as the guides who lead students toward progress and growth, and they are the first illuminators who shape students' outlook on life, their system of values, and their nascent understanding of the law. As society continues to develop, numerous scandals involving academic

misconduct and scholarly fraud among university teachers have been exposed, provoking public concern regarding the legal consciousness of those who are regarded as “engineers of the human soul” within institutions of higher learning. With the steady advancement of society, students themselves have begun to cultivate a heightened awareness of the law, learning to wield legal instruments to safeguard their own rights and interests; yet, in such a context, if students were to bring legal action against their teachers, the resulting tension could further intensify conflicts within the teacher–student relationship. Young university teachers occupy a unique position within higher education, for they transition directly from their own student years into the distinguished role of educator, thereby forming a special cohort that straddles the boundary between the times of being a student and professional academic life.

This paper therefore takes the current state of legal awareness among young university teachers as its primary point of departure, examining the problems inherent in their present level of legal literacy and proposing corresponding strategies for improvement, so as to prevent these young educators from falling into corruption, violating the law, or otherwise jeopardizing the promising futures.

2.The Significance of Studying the Legal and Regulatory Awareness of Young College Teachers

The rule of law stands as the very cornerstone of governance in modern society, safeguarding the rights and interests of every member of the community and serving as a powerful instrument for guiding, regulating, and constraining social behavior. No society can truly flourish without a sound, impartial, and well-functioning legal system, nor without citizens who conscientiously uphold and apply the law in their daily lives. In China, the comprehensive promotion of law-based governance constitutes a fundamental state strategy. It entails governing national affairs strictly in accordance with the Constitution and statutory law and serves as the essential guarantee of the people’s role as masters of the nation. At present, this comprehensive effort to strengthen the rule of law represents a profound transformation in China’s national governance system—a transformation that bears directly upon the well-being of the population and the long-term stability and prosperity of the nation. Viewed from this broader historical horizon, it becomes evident that China’s aspiration to enter the ranks of modern socialist nations and to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation depends fundamentally on the full establishment of a society grounded in the rule of law. For such a society to take root, citizens must cultivate an enduring commitment to respecting, abiding by, and utilizing the law as a guiding principle in personal conduct and public life.

Universities function not only as institutions where advanced professional knowledge is transmitted, but also as vital arenas in which students’ moral character and legal consciousness are nurtured and strengthened. Young university teachers, who engage daily in the teaching of knowledge, the resolution of students’ academic and personal dilemmas, and the dissemination of legal understanding, hold a particularly influential position in this educational ecology. When these young educators possess a strong awareness of laws and regulations, their students, guided simultaneously by explicit instruction

and subtle example, are far more likely to cultivate a comprehensive and lasting respect for the rule of law. However, when young university teachers themselves lack a firm foundation in legal awareness, the consequences can be deeply troubling. They may, whether intentionally or inadvertently, engage in behaviors that infringe upon students' legitimate rights, tarnish both personal and institutional reputations, or even inflict broader social harm. At the same time, students who fail to receive proper cultivation and guidance in legal consciousness may come to transgress legal boundaries, violate laws and regulations, and ultimately pose risks to the social order. Such outcomes constitute a loss not only for the individual student but also for the teacher, the university, and society at large—each bearing the repercussions of insufficient legal awareness in the realm of higher education.

3. Literature Review on Legal Awareness in Higher Education Faculty

Chinese scholars have produced relatively few research outcomes concerning the legal awareness of university teachers, and in the past one or two years there have been virtually no new studies. Nevertheless, the existing literature provides a theoretical foundation for the present research.

Ding (2015) offered suggestions on how young university teachers can enhance their legal literacy from four distinct perspectives: the state, society, universities, and young teachers themselves. Among these suggestions, Ding argued that young university teachers who have the necessary conditions should immerse themselves in society and participate personally in judicial practice activities; if possible, they may even serve as members of a jury, which would be conducive to cultivating their own awareness of laws and regulations. Xu (2016) contended that the cultivation of legal awareness among young university teachers serves as an embodiment of leading by example, and that such awareness plays an important role in teachers' personal development, helping them avoid actions that might jeopardize their own professional future. Guo (2017) asserted that improving university teachers' awareness of educational laws and regulations is a reflection of protecting students' rights and respecting and fostering students' personal development, and it also represents the practice of complying with laws and regulations in educational settings. Jiang (2017) observed that university counselors are also members of the teaching staff and categorized the counselor–student relationship into two layers: the first being the relationship of teaching and being taught, and the second being the administrative-legal relationship of managing and being managed. Jiang further proposed that counselors should “manage classes in accordance with the law,” and therefore, in addition to their routine work, they should strengthen their study of relevant laws and regulations. In handling problems, counselors should adhere to legal principles, rely on evidence, and follow proper procedures; they must not resolve issues based solely on personal emotions. When dealing with student-related matters, they should base their decisions on facts, use the law as a normative standard, and exercise strict self-discipline in their words and actions. Liu (2018) argued that drawing on the experience of rule-of-law-based governance within American universities could help improve China's system of governing universities according to law. This improvement, according to Liu, should proceed through

three main measures: first, constructing a regulatory framework centered on faculty and students; second, establishing independent legal affairs institutions to form a comprehensive network of legal services; and third, developing internal dispute-resolution mechanisms that prioritize the settlement of conflicts through non-litigation means. Zhang (2020) argued that, on the one hand, inadequate teacher compensation and insufficient protection of teachers' rights have led to a serious sense of occupational burnout rather than professional pride; on the other hand, repeated challenges to teachers' moral integrity ("teacher ethics") have brought shame upon the teaching profession. Since teacher ethics represent the professional morality of the teaching occupation, discussions of such morality should be grounded in the construction of professional standards, and the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of teachers must be clearly defined. Zhang argued that universities should enhance legal education for teachers, effectively safeguard students' lawful rights and interests, and promote reforms and innovations in university legal governance in order to strengthen rule-of-law construction in higher education. Yang (2023) stated that improving university teachers' awareness of laws and regulations primarily entails four approaches: strengthening their own study of laws and regulations, consciously complying with legal requirements and university rules, ensuring that legal principles permeate the entire teaching process, and participating in university governance in accordance with the law.

Through a review of the literature, it becomes apparent that many universities have not established legal affairs institutions that are oriented toward and serve both faculty and students. Young university teachers, aside from receiving a limited amount of legal education during their student years, face heavy research and teaching pressures once they enter academic positions. Coupled with increasingly stringent requirements for promotion, young teachers find it extremely difficult to rely solely on themselves to acquire legal knowledge. In recent years, the commercialization and transformation of scientific and technological achievements by university teachers have resulted in numerous civil disputes, and scandals involving academic misconduct and academic fraud among young university teachers have also been exposed. All of these phenomena indicate that the legal awareness of young university teachers remains insufficient.

Universities and related institutions urgently need to pay attention to the legal awareness of young university teachers so as to prevent patent disputes and civil litigation from creating unnecessary difficulties in their research commercialization, and to avoid academic misconduct and academic fraud scandals that could damage the reputation of universities. Building on previous studies, this paper summarizes the current status of legal awareness among young university teachers, incorporates an analysis of the psychological motivations underlying their insufficient legal awareness, and investigates strategies for cultivating and enhancing such awareness, thereby filling a research gap in this field. A summary table of the reviewed literature see Table1.

Table 1. The Review of Literatures

Author	Publication Year	Research Focus	Key Findings / Conclusions
Ding Yuan	2015	Pathways for enhancing young university teachers' legal literacy	Proposed a four-dimensional framework (state, society, university, individual) to guide the cultivation of legal literacy among young university teachers.
Xu Qisheng	2016	Approaches to developing legal awareness in young university teachers	Emphasized that cultivating legal awareness enables teachers to manage their relationships with universities, society, and students more effectively.
Guo Zipeng	2017	Cultivation of university teachers' awareness of educational laws and regulations	Highlighted that compliance with educational laws is essential to rule-of-law governance in universities and crucial for protecting student rights and fostering student personality development.
Jiang E	2017	Legal awareness among university counselors	Identified two relational dimensions between counselors and students—pedagogical and administrative—legal—and advocated “law-based class management” supported by strengthened legal study.
Liu Wen	2018	Challenges in the legal governance of Chinese universities	Found that legal governance in universities remains underdeveloped; recommended learning from U.S. practices by building internal legal systems, establishing legal affairs offices, and improving dispute-resolution channels.

Zhang Wen	2020	The significance of university teachers' legal awareness	Argued that improving legal awareness, protecting student rights, and strengthening legal governance reform are necessary to address teacher burnout and ethical controversies.
Yang Zilan	2023	Legal awareness and law-based teaching among university teachers	Proposed enhancing legal awareness by reinforcing legal study, maintaining compliance with laws and university rules, embedding legal elements in teaching, and participating in governance according to law.

4. The Current Situation and Reasons for the Lack of Legal Awareness among Young University Teachers

4.1 Young University Teachers Possess only a Preliminary Understanding of Laws and Regulations

Because China promulgated the Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 1995 and the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 1998, the content of education, the qualifications of university teachers, and evaluation standards were incorporated into statutory provisions, thereby establishing clear legal norms for the qualifications, competencies, and conduct of young university teachers.

These two legislative documents have been implemented for many years, and as a result, young university teachers in China have acquired a certain level of understanding of the corresponding laws and regulations and are generally able to follow relevant requirements in teaching and other professional tasks.

However, they remain unfamiliar with other legal documents. Consequently, some teachers experience difficulty in accurately interpreting the terms of research project contracts, which may lead to situations in which their own rights and interests are compromised.

Moreover, university teachers in China generally lack sufficient understanding of intellectual property laws and regulations. As a result, they may unintentionally engage in improper citation of others' research outcomes, fail to protect their own research outcomes adequately, or encounter difficulties in gathering evidence to defend their rights when intellectual property disputes arise.

4.2 Young University Teachers Lack Access to Legal Consultation and Legal Aid Services

According to Liu Wen's survey (Liu, 2018) of the top 35 universities in China, only 6 of these institutions have established legal service organizations dedicated to faculty and students. Thus, young

university teachers and students in most of these top universities have long lacked access to professional legal education and guidance. Based on the conclusions of Liu's sample survey, the majority of young university teachers and students nationwide do not have access to legal consultation services within their universities. In other words, if young university teachers or students wish to seek legal advice, they must either contact external organizations or rely on acquaintances who work in legal professions.

4.3 Some Young University Teachers Have Engaged in Illegal or Unlawful Behavior

In recent years, incidents involving university teachers violating laws and regulations have occurred repeatedly. For example, during nationwide campaigns focused on anti-corruption and integrity, some teachers continued to accept bribes from others and allocated student positions improperly; some teachers solicited gifts, money, or other benefits from students, thereby harming students' rights and interests; some engaged in inappropriate relationships with students; some demanded kickbacks through infrastructure construction projects; some engaged in academic fraud; and some committed various forms of academic misconduct. Recently, at the Computer Science School of Xi'an oil University, a teacher publicly reported two colleagues for academic misconduct, including "one manuscript sliced into three publications," "multiple inflated or duplicate publications," and "widespread misuse of fund project identifiers." Isolated cases have also emerged in which teachers exchanged sexual favors for acceptance of academic manuscripts by journals.

4.4 Analysis of the Underlying Causes of the Current Legal Awareness among Young University Teachers

The above cases demonstrate that the legal awareness of young university teachers requires significant improvement. An analysis of these incidents suggests four main psychological motivations behind the unlawful behavior of some university teachers:

First, their personal awareness of laws and regulations is weak, and they fail to impose strict requirements on their own conduct. Coupled with temptations involving power, sexual relationships, and financial gain, they may easily engage in illegal or unlawful behavior.

Second, the promotion of legal education within universities is insufficient. As a result, teachers may overlook the importance of laws and regulations, fail to apply legal principles in university affairs, and misuse their positions for personal gain.

Third, under the "up-or-out" evaluation mechanism adopted by many universities, young teachers experience extreme pressure related to research output. To achieve rapid promotion, some teachers resort to opportunistic behaviors—including various forms of academic misconduct and academic fraud—to obtain research achievement and thereby secure accelerated career advancement.

Fourth, some teachers exhibit jealousy and opportunism. When they see others achieving benefits through questionable means, while they themselves receive none and remain disadvantaged in promotion, they may develop jealousy and a mentality of taking chances.

Even under institutional oversight, some continue to engage in misconduct, which ultimately comes to

light through reports or exposure of wrongdoing. Only after being disciplined by the university, detained by public security authorities, or tried by courts do such teachers acknowledge their violations. In addition, during their university studies, young teachers—except for those majoring in law—receive relatively little legal education. Apart from a limited number of general education courses on law, students in most disciplines can only rely on self-study to acquire legal knowledge. Therefore, the legal education received during their student years is insufficient, and their legal awareness is weak from the outset. When young teachers transition from student life to academic positions, they face heavy workloads in teaching and research.

As they must devote substantial time to these responsibilities, it becomes even more difficult for them to engage in self-directed learning of legal knowledge, which further hinders the improvement of their legal awareness.

5. Strategies for Enhancing the Legal Literacy and Compliance of Young University Faculty

Based on the preceding analysis regarding the current status of legal and regulatory consciousness among young university faculty and the psychological motivations underlying illegal behavior, it is evident that the reinforcement of such consciousness requires a tripartite approach encompassing three dimensions: the individual faculty members themselves, the university administration, and society at large.

5.1 The Dimension of Young University Faculty (Individual Level)

5.1.1 Strengthening Legal Knowledge Acquisition

University teachers should elevate their individual level of legal knowledge through both autonomous study and participation in external training programs.

5.1.2 Enhancing Rule-of-Law Consciousness and Practical Application

Through daily study and regular participation in training, faculty members must establish a correct concept of the rule of law and integrate legal education into routine teaching activities. This includes interspersing legal anecdotes or general legal knowledge within classroom instruction. Furthermore, they must strictly abide by laws and regulations outside the classroom context, acting as role models by setting a personal example, and utilizing legal tools to assist students or others in need.

5.2 The Dimension of the University (Institutional Level)

5.2.1 Enhancing Consciousness through Passive Learning Approaches

First, universities should organize regular lectures and seminars on legal knowledge by inviting judges and lawyers, ensuring that relevant legal principles are deeply internalized by young faculty through repeated advocacy by practical legal professionals. Second, universities should utilize campus media, publicity boards, and other channels to popularize legal knowledge, thereby cultivating a sound campus culture characterized by the rule of law.

5.2.2 Enhancing Consciousness through Innovative Active Learning Approaches

Universities can adopt innovative legal education methodologies—such as moot courts, case studies,

legal knowledge competitions, debates on laws and regulations, and organizing visits for young faculty to courts to observe trials—to improve their practical capabilities regarding laws and regulations.

5.2.3 Establishing a Normalized Mechanism for Law-Based School Management and Teaching

Universities should issue relevant institutional documents for law-based governance and education. These should include measures for the construction of a rule-of-law culture, protocols for the punishment and handling of faculty misconduct or criminal behavior, and regulations for the protection of the rights and interests of both teachers and students. This establishes a sound legal working mechanism to ensure that all administrative decisions and actions strictly comply with relevant legal provisions.

5.2.4 Establishing Legal Aid Centers

Universities can establish legal consultation centers staffed by external legal professionals to provide legal advice and assistance to faculty and students.

5.2.5 Opening Channels for Complaints and Feedback

The legal and regulatory consciousness of young faculty requires supervision by students and other staff members. Opening channels for complaints and feedback facilitates this supervision, urging young faculty to enhance their legal awareness, strictly observe discipline and laws in both classroom teaching and scientific research, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of others.

5.3 *The Dimension of Society (Societal Level)*

5.3.1 Elevating Ideological Stance and Adhering to the Construction of a Rule-of-Law Society

Young university teachers are not merely educational staff but also members of the broader society. If society as a whole does not advocate for the construction of a rule-of-law society, faculty members are unlikely to prioritize the cultivation of their own legal consciousness. Elevating the ideological stance and adhering to the path of building a rule-of-law society will accelerate the transition from a traditional "society of personal connections" (Renqing society) to a "society of rule of law." This will mobilize all personnel toward learning and abiding by the law, enabling young faculty to establish values of understanding, respecting, and obeying the law within the broader "university of society," thereby cultivating their legal consciousness.

5.3.2 Accelerating Universal Legal Education and Shaping a Positive Atmosphere for Learning and Understanding the Law

Various social sectors should popularize legal knowledge through diverse forms, such as television publicity, bulletin boards, newspapers, and radio broadcasts. Activities such as legal salons, online legal knowledge competitions, and historical exhibitions on law should be organized to mobilize the enthusiasm of the entire society for learning the law. By accelerating universal legal education and shaping a social ethos where "law-abiding is glorious, and law-breaking is shameful," young faculty will be encouraged to consciously strengthen their legal knowledge through various societal channels. Consequently, they will spontaneously abide by laws and regulations, adhere to university rules, and set an example of law-abiding behavior for their students.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigates the current status of legal and regulatory consciousness among young faculty members in institutions of higher education. It conducts an in-depth analysis of both the internal psychological motivations and the external factors contributing to the observed deficiency in their legal and regulatory awareness, and subsequently proposes a comprehensive series of strategies aimed at enhancing this consciousness.

Focusing on the status quo, and actively cultivating and elevating the legal and regulatory consciousness of young university teachers, constitutes a pivotal component in advancing the law-based governance of class management, educational instruction, and institutional administration (i.e., promoting the rule of law in class, teaching, and school management). Furthermore, it serves as a fundamental pillar for the construction of a campus culture characterized by integrity and probity.

Ultimately, the substantial enhancement of legal and regulatory consciousness among young faculty members is a prerequisite for effectively cultivating a sound legal worldview in students. Only through this improvement can universities fulfill their mission of supplying the nation and society with high-quality talents who respect, observe, and cherish the law.

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