Journal of Legal and Political Education · Volume 2 · Number 2 · 2025 · eISSN: 2955-2389
Published online by the Institute for Research and European Studies at www.iies.mk/jlpe

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(*) Corresponding author
Peer review method: Double-blind
Research article
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47305/jlpe.2025.1904
Received: 05.05.2025 • Accepted after revision: 19.10.2025 • Published: 24.10.2025
Pages: 24-45

Simulating Justice: Using Roleplay and Moot Court to Teach Human Rights in Value-Diverse Environments

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Abstract: *Teaching human rights law poses distinct challenges in societies where political, cultural, or religious values reduce the emphasis on individual rights. Traditional liberal democratic frameworks often clash with local worldviews, creating student resistance and disengagement. This study explores how simulation-based learning through roleplay and moot courts can enhance human rights education in value-diverse or resistant contexts. Using a systematic literature review, it analyzes global case studies to evaluate the pedagogical, ethical, and affective impacts of simulations. Findings show that simulations improve engagement, empathy, and critical thinking while offering a neutral environment for discussing controversial issues. However, effectiveness depends on skilled facilitation and contextual adaptation. The study concludes that simulations are transformative tools that strengthen students' legal reasoning, empathy, and professional competence in culturally plural environments.*

Keywords: *Human Rights Education; Simulation; Roleplay; Moot Court; Pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Human rights law presents distinctive educational challenges for legal institutions, especially those operating in regions where political systems or cultural and religious beliefs diminish or discourage the importance of individual rights. This difficulty arises because human rights education is typically grounded in a liberal democratic framework that emphasizes universal rights, individual autonomy, and protection against state interference. However, these assumptions often conflict with the prevailing cultural values, communal practices, and political discourses across the world, including in transitional democracies and traditional societies.

For legal educators, this divergence creates significant challenges in teaching rights-based frameworks to students who may be resistant, disinterested, or even opposed to such norms. Traditional lecture-based methods often fail to engage students meaningfully or to promote a deep understanding of human rights principles. Therefore, innovative educational approaches are needed that go beyond conventional instruction and foster active learning.

Experiential and simulation-based learning strategies, such as roleplay exercises and moot courts, offer practical tools to enhance student engagement and understanding. By participating in simulated legal processes, students assume different roles, analyze human rights cases, and develop their reasoning and advocacy skills in an interactive, structured environment. These pedagogical simulations not only make learning more dynamic but also encourage students to critically reflect on the principles and practices that shape human rights law.

Problem Statement

Traditional lecture-based legal education struggles to effectively engage students with human rights content, particularly when learners do not share the foundational assumptions of human rights law. Students who feel disconnected from human rights principles often find the material abstract, controversial, or irrelevant to their cultural and political context. In environments where political ideologies or social norms conflict with liberal-democratic notions of individual rights, rights-based advocacy in the classroom can create resistance or discomfort among students.

This research investigates how human rights law can be taught more effectively in such value-diverse educational contexts. Specifically, it explores whether simulation-based methods, such as roleplay exercises and moot courts, can bridge the gap between theoretical human rights frameworks and active student engagement, fostering deeper understanding even among students initially resistant to the subject.

Objective

This research examines the effectiveness of roleplay and moot court simulations in improving human rights law education within educational environments that resist the universality of human rights. The study aims to:

- Investigate how simulation methods can foster a critical understanding of human rights through innovative pedagogical approaches.
- Explore the strengths and weaknesses of simulation-based teaching methods compared to traditional educational approaches.
- Analyze case studies and academic literature to develop practical guidelines for legal educators working in environments characterized by ideological diversity.

Significance

The research contributes to advancing legal education by exploring simulation as a powerful tool for educational transformation. It establishes simulation as an essential pedagogical instrument that goes beyond serving as a supplemental teaching method, effectively reducing resistance and fostering human rights awareness within legal education.

Amid the growing challenges to rights discourse across both the Global South and the Global North, understanding value-sensitive approaches to teaching human rights has become increasingly important. This study offers practical guidelines to assist educators, curriculum designers, and academic institutions in preparing future lawyers who integrate critical thinking, empathy, and informed practice into their professional development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Human Rights: Normative and Pedagogical Challenges

The educational approach to human rights within legal studies often relies on a shared moral framework that prioritizes universal principles, individual autonomy, and protection from state interference. Marie-Bénédicte Dembour (2010, 2–5) presents a typology of human rights schools of thought, demonstrating that learners and legal systems do not necessarily interpret human rights through a "natural school" perspective. Several educational frameworks instead base their approaches on protest activism, discourse analysis, or deliberative political processes (Dembour 2010, 15–19). These diverse perspectives on human rights create challenges for educational settings seeking to integrate human rights norms effectively.

According to Jeremy Waldron, the liberal assumptions embedded in many human rights curricula risk excluding students whose beliefs are rooted in communitarian or religious traditions (Christiano 2000, 516–517). This challenge becomes even more pronounced when students from non-Western backgrounds or multicultural contexts question the moral foundations and legal authority of international human rights law.

Experiential Learning in Legal Education

Active learning methods have become the dominant approach in contemporary legal education. The pedagogical transformation of legal studies relies heavily on Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984, 21–26), which explains how knowledge develops through four interconnected stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb 1984, 31, 34). Within this framework, simulations such as moot courts and roleplay offer students impactful experiential learning environments.

In addition, Schön's model of the "reflective practitioner" emphasizes that legal education should cultivate students' capacity for reflection rather than focus solely on content delivery (Schön 1983, 334). Through moot court experiences, students engage directly with human rights norms while confronting the complex realities and ethical challenges of legal advocacy.

To further strengthen the theoretical foundation of this research, the discussion on experiential learning can be expanded to include Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, which frames education as a dialogic process in which learners critically engage with systems of oppression and develop social justice awareness (Freire 1970). Similarly, Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning highlights how reflective engagement with disorienting experiences can shift frames of reference and foster moral development (Fleming 2018, 121–124). Together, these perspectives reinforce that reflection within simulation-based teaching promotes both critical awareness and moral transformation.

Roleplay and Moot Courts as Pedagogical Tools

Simulation-based methods are widely recognized as fundamental teaching tools in modern legal education (Jiang 2024, 12–13). Through moot court activities, students participate

in simulated appellate proceedings that strengthen their legal reasoning, research, and oral advocacy skills. Roleplay extends beyond traditional courtroom settings by replicating the dynamics of human rights commissions, legislative bodies, and negotiation tables (Arsenijević 2024, 190).

These methods are particularly effective for teaching "controversial content," as they allow students to experience diverse perspectives rather than merely analyze them (Waters 2016, 175–176). By engaging in structured dramatic performances, students can explore complex moral and legal issues, such as torture, gender discrimination, and religious freedom, within a controlled and reflective learning environment (Romanova and Gudalov 2019, 412).

Empirical research shows that simulation-based learning produces superior cognitive and affective outcomes. Studies indicate that students engaged in simulations retain knowledge more effectively and demonstrate higher levels of classroom engagement compared to those taught through traditional lectures (Abu Issa, Kaddumi, and Alwerikat 2023, 268–269). Moreover, human rights simulations often evoke strong emotional responses, which educators can harness as pedagogical tools to foster empathy, deepen reflection, and enhance moral understanding (Phillips 2013, 1–3).

Simulation in Diverse or Resistant Contexts

Value-diverse environments can particularly benefit from simulation as a protected and inclusive teaching method. In such settings, students are encouraged to demonstrate human rights principles through roleplay activities rather than simply affirm their belief in them (Munin and Efron 2017, 316–317). This approach enables participants to engage with controversial issues without requiring alignment on political or ideological grounds.

Research shows that roleplaying exercises allow students to explore identities and legal frameworks beyond their personal experiences (Munin and Efron 2017, 311–316). Simulations help separate personal opinions from academic discussions, fostering dialogue that accommodates multiple perspectives and avoids the polarization that often characterizes moral or political debates (Romanova and Gudalov 2019, 419).In educational contexts where international human rights are contested, simulation-based learning proves transformative. Moot court exercises demand more than the simple transfer of information; they require the creation of critical spaces where students can examine international norms in relation to their own values (Munin and Efron 2017, 309; Suartha and Martha 2020, 112; Gerber and Castan 2013, 310). Through these experiential settings, students encounter a protected environment in which they can navigate conflicts involving power dynamics, justice, and moral reasoning (Heyns et al. 2008, 17).

Identified Gaps in the Existing Literature

Research strongly supports the educational benefits of simulation in legal training; however, few studies have examined its effectiveness in teaching human rights when students encounter ideological barriers. Most existing scholarship focuses on moot court competitions in liberal-democratic contexts or within clinical legal education, approaches that may be less feasible or effective in more restrictive environments.

This research seeks to bridge this gap by integrating findings from prior studies on simulation-based legal pedagogy and applying them to educational settings where students hold diverse values or resist dominant ideologies. The proposed framework illustrates how simulation activities function not only as instructional tools for developing legal and advocacy skills but also as platforms for reconciling conflicting perspectives within the study of human rights law.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant materials. The SLR approach is selected for its rigor, transparency, and replicability, enabling a comprehensive and unbiased analysis of the existing evidence base. The research design is desk-based, relying solely on secondary sources as the main information base.

The study examines published literature, case studies, and pedagogical models to determine effective methods for using roleplay and moot court simulations in teaching human rights law within classrooms characterized by diverse values and resistant ideologies. The SLR process follows a predefined protocol to minimize bias.

Due to the absence of primary research and interviews, the study relies on peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, legal pedagogical sources, and books to develop an evidence-based analysis of simulation-based learning in human rights education.

Data Sources

This research relies on the following primary data sources:

- Scholarly Articles: Peer-reviewed articles that examine the use of simulation in legal education, human rights pedagogy, and experiential learning.
- Books: Foundational texts in legal education theory, human rights law, and simulation-based learning that provide theoretical and methodological grounding for the study.
- Case Studies: Documented examples of simulation-based human rights education implemented in various global contexts, with particular emphasis on politically or culturally resistant environments.
- Dissertations and Theses: Graduate- and doctoral-level research that explores the application of simulation techniques within legal and human rights education.

Literature Review Process

This study employed a systematic and iterative approach to review academic and pedagogical literature that evaluated and synthesized key sources exploring the relationship between human rights education and experiential learning in value-diverse or resistant educational environments. The objective extended beyond merely collecting supporting materials; it aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of simulation-based teaching tools,

including roleplay and moot court activities, in both their theoretical foundations and their practical applications within legal education systems that address human rights norms subject to conflicting interpretations.

The review began with extensive keyword searches across major academic databases, including JSTOR, SSRN, HeinOnline, LexisNexis, and Google Scholar. Search terms combined phrases such as "human rights education," "experiential learning," "legal pedagogy," "moot court," "roleplay," "simulation in education," and "pedagogical resistance" or "value-diverse classrooms." Boolean operators and subject filters were used to identify peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, and institutional reports published within the past 20 years, with particular emphasis on materials published since 2010 to ensure contemporary relevance.

All sources were evaluated based on their academic rigor, relevance to the research question, and authorial and institutional credibility. Priority was given to publications in high-impact law and education journals, as well as to theoretical frameworks and pedagogical models developed by scholars recognized for their expertise in legal education and grounded in robust academic literature.

This systematic review provided comprehensive coverage by integrating both theoretical perspectives and practical insights consistent with the study's central research focus. The analysis also incorporated Global South perspectives and critiques of Eurocentric approaches to human rights education, thereby addressing the postcolonial and pluralistic dimensions that underpin this research topic.

Data Analysis Approach

This study uses a qualitative analysis approach to combine the results from different sources. Each source was reviewed for its contribution to understanding how simulation-based methods can be applied in resistant or diverse educational contexts.

- Thematic Analysis: The data were grouped into themes based on common threads found in the literature, for instance, the benefits of simulation-based learning, challenges in teaching human rights in resistant contexts, and the pedagogical strategies employed to overcome ideological barriers.
- Comparative Analysis: Data were grouped into themes based on common threads across the literature, such as the advantages of simulation-based learning, the difficulties of teaching human rights in resistant contexts, and the pedagogical approaches used to overcome ideological barriers.
- Case Study Synthesis: Examples of simulation-based human rights education in resistant contexts were analyzed in order to outline best practices and common obstacles.

The result of this process is a conceptual framework that shows how roleplay and moot courts can be used to improve the teaching of human rights across a variety of classrooms, along with practical recommendations for teachers.

Limitations of Methodology

As a desk-based study, this research is constrained by the availability and quality of secondary sources. Although extensive effort was devoted to locating relevant and credible literature, the absence of primary data, such as interviews or direct observations of classroom settings, limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of simulation-based strategies within specific learning environments.

Furthermore, the analysis is limited to the existing literature, meaning the recommendations and insights derived may not fully capture the complex dynamics of individual classrooms or students' immediate reactions to simulation-oriented teaching approaches. Future studies incorporating primary data collection methods, such as surveys or interviews with educators and students, could enhance understanding of the impact of simulation-based learning in diverse or ideologically resistant educational contexts.

RESULTS

Overview of Key Findings

The literature review on simulation-based learning in the context of human rights education identifies several key findings that support the use of roleplay and moot court simulations as practical pedagogical tools. These findings highlight the advantages, challenges, and practicalities of using simulations in various or ideologically unyielding environments.

Benefits of Simulation-Based Learning in Human Rights Education

Increased Engagement and Empathy

Simulation-based methods enhance student engagement by enabling participants to adopt diverse perspectives, immerse themselves in complex legal and moral challenges, and foster empathy. Through roleplay, students are encouraged to identify with others, particularly individuals who are marginalized or experience ongoing human rights violations in their daily lives (Sutton and Buis 2023, 1111). Participants in such simulations often report a heightened emotional investment in the subject matter (Munin and Efron 2017, 330). This emotional connection is especially valuable in human rights education, as it moves learning beyond abstract legal principles and encourages students to reflect on the real-world implications of human rights violations.

Practical Skill Development

Moot court simulations play a vital role in helping students develop practical legal skills (Arsenijević 2024, 191). These include legal research, reasoned argumentation, and oral advocacy, all essential competencies for the practice of human rights law (Gerber and Castan 2013, 299). Students who engage in simulation-based learning demonstrate greater proficiency

in understanding legal processes and applying legal theory to real-world situations (Heyns et al. 2008, 17; Munin and Efron 2017, 313; Arsenijević 2024, 12).

Exposure to Diverse Legal and Cultural Perspectives

Simulation-based techniques implemented in value-diverse or ideologically opposed classrooms allow students to engage with a variety of legal systems, cultural norms, and political ideologies (Heyns et al. 2008, 17; Munin and Efron 2017, 316–317). Simulation serves as a "neutralizing" pedagogical tool, offering students the opportunity to explore multiple perspectives without the need to personally adopt or defend them (Asal and Blake 2006, 1–5). This approach is particularly valuable in contexts where human rights law is perceived as foreign, contested, or ideologically sensitive.

Fostering Critical Thinking and Reflection

Simulation-based learning promotes critical thinking by requiring students to evaluate, question, and apply legal norms across diverse scenarios that often involve conflicting interests or values among participants (Heyns et al. 2008, 20). Simulations also create space for students to examine international human rights norms critically and to challenge the assumptions embedded within those frameworks (Heyns et al. 2008, 21). This deeper level of engagement is essential for equipping students with the analytical and reflective skills needed to navigate the complex challenges of human rights practice in real-world contexts.

Challenges in Implementing Simulation-Based Learning

Cultural and Ideological Resistance

The main challenge lies in the presence of cultural and ideological opposition to human rights education in specific contexts. In classrooms that may be hostile or at least skeptical toward human rights norms, simulations can be perceived as an imposition of foreign values. The "liberal presumption" inherent in human rights law may alienate students who embrace communal or religious values that prioritize duties to society or family over individual rights. In such cases, strong resistance to roleplay and moot court simulations is likely.

Difficulty in Ensuring Realistic Engagement

Although simulations offer valuable opportunities for experiential learning, it is not always easy to ensure that students fully engage in the simulation process. Students may focus more on performing their assigned roles rather than deeply reflecting on the underlying human rights issues (Gerber and Castan 2013, 301). Such superficial participation can undermine the simulation's effectiveness as a pedagogical tool.

Facilitator's Role in Guiding Simulations

The success of this type of learning largely depends on the facilitator's ability to guide students through complex scenarios and foster meaningful reflection. Without proper guidance, simulations can easily devolve into superficial roleplaying exercises that fail to achieve genuine educational objectives (Jiang 2024, 14). Effective facilitation requires instructors who are knowledgeable about the legal content and skilled at leading discussions and encouraging critical reflection (Jiang 2024, 14).

Logistical and Resource Constraints

Another practical challenge in using simulations is the availability of resources. Organizing moot court simulations and roleplay exercises typically requires substantial time, effort, and financial support (Heyns et al. 2008, 37). These activities may not be feasible in resource-constrained educational settings or in contexts where access to legal materials and institutional support is limited.

Impact on Student Attitudes and Perspectives

Moot court exercises can be effectively integrated into the legal curriculum to enhance the quality of education. Research conducted at the Applied Science Private University in Jordan demonstrated that these exercises play a significant role in strengthening students' skills in legal reasoning and advocacy (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 268–269).

Moreover, participation in moot court activities improves students' public speaking abilities and boosts their confidence (Ringel 2004, 464). Arguing before judges and peers in a simulated courtroom setting enables students to develop composure and articulate their thoughts effectively under pressure. Such experiences are invaluable in preparing students for the realities of legal practice. One study found that students reported improved public speaking and critical thinking skills, as well as greater confidence in presenting legal arguments (Kammerer 2018, 192–193).

The collaborative nature of moot court also fosters teamwork and interpersonal skills. Students must work closely with teammates to construct coherent arguments and develop sound strategies, mirroring the cooperative dynamics of professional legal practice (Kammerer 2018, 192–193). This process helps them cultivate communication and coordination skills essential to success in the legal profession.

At Karlstad University in Sweden, roleplay exercises have been introduced into tax law courses to prepare students for professional practice, with particular emphasis on teamwork and communication effectiveness in legal contexts (Karlstad University 2019).

Moreover, moot court exercises expose students to courtroom procedures and professional etiquette, providing them with a realistic understanding of legal proceedings (Gerber and Castan 2013, 307–309). Through simulations of real-life legal situations, students learn the roles and responsibilities of different courtroom participants, the application of procedural rules, and the nuances of advocacy as a professional legal practice (Kammerer 2018,

192–193). Such practical exposure is essential in helping students transition from academic study to professional legal careers.

The European Journal of Law and Technology reported on the effective use of virtual law cases in teaching contract law and found that students perceived these simulations as both realistic and valuable for deepening their understanding (Fors and Skoglund 2013).

Students who participate in moot court frequently report greater interest in legal studies and a deeper comprehension of the complexities of the legal system (Kammerer 2018, 192–193). Consequently, this experiential learning method plays a vital role in shaping students' professional identity and fostering their sense of vocation toward the legal profession. Research further indicates that roleplay simulations in legal education enhance not only students' understanding of legal concepts but also their professional skills and ethical awareness (Munin and Efron 2017, 326–328; Jiang 2024, 14–15).

Synthesis of Key Case Studies

The integration of moot court and simulation-based learning into legal education has been extensively documented through various case studies demonstrating their positive impact on student development and the overall quality of legal training.

A notable example is the moot court program at the Applied Science Private University in Jordan (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 269–270). Between 2003 and 2022, the Faculty of Law organized a series of moot court exercises in which students participated in simulated legal proceedings. A survey of 70 graduates revealed substantial improvements in their legal competencies, particularly in reasoning and advocacy. The study concluded that incorporating moot courts into the curriculum significantly enhances the quality of legal education and recommended that such exercises become a mandatory component of every law student's training (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 268–269).

In the United Kingdom, Canterbury Christ Church University conducted research on the effectiveness of roleplay simulations in undergraduate legal education (Waters 2016, 173–174). The study, conducted in a mediation module, involved students participating in structured roleplay exercises. The findings indicated that these simulations significantly improved students' motivation, confidence, and understanding of legal concepts. Participants reported that the activities provided a richer learning experience and offered valuable practical preparation for professional legal practice (Waters 2016, 178–185).

Another case study from the United States, published in The Journal of Legal Education, examined the influence of moot court participation on students' perceptions of professional legal practice (Gaubatz 1981, 105–106). The research found that structured moot court competitions increased students' confidence in their ability to represent clients effectively. Moreover, the moot court experience not only refined their technical legal skills but also fostered moral judgment and critical reflection regarding their future roles as legal professionals (Gaubatz 1981, 103–104). These findings align with broader evidence suggesting that simulation-based approaches help students internalize the ethical responsibilities and professional identity central to legal practice.

Comparative Analysis on the Impact of Simulation-Based Learning

Simulation-based learning models, particularly moot court, have proven to be highly effective tools for teaching human rights in contexts where students and communities hold diverse or even opposing values. This pedagogical approach extends beyond lectures and textbooks by immersing students in real-life legal scenarios, strengthening their practical skills, and fostering collaboration across cultural and ideological divides.

For example, the African Human Rights Moot Court provides students with firsthand experience in both regional and international human rights systems, often requiring them to reconcile conflicting legal standards (Gerber and Castan 2013, 303). It helps participants develop key professional skills such as legal research, public speaking, time management, and teamwork (Heyns, Taku, and Viljoen 2008, 20–22). Similarly, the Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court adds the complexity of multilingual legal arguments, challenging students to operate within different linguistic and legal frameworks (Gerber and Castan 2013, 305).In Indonesia, legal education frequently integrates moot courts with real-life case files, providing students with both theoretical depth and procedural insight into the practice of law (Suartha and Martha 2020, 105). The ZAC roleplay model adopts a "pseudo-real" approach, enabling students from diverse, ideologically opposed communities to engage in discussions on sensitive issues within a safe, structured environment (Munin and Efron 2017, 316–317). In Brazil, moot court simulations combined with team-based and challenge-based learning modules (TBL/CBL) encourage students to collaborate in stable but diverse groups, addressing socially relevant legal problems through research-driven analysis (Santana, Araújo, Moresi, Caliman, and Costa-Lobo 2019, 9008–9009).

At the University of Niš, internal competitions range from simulations of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to anti-discrimination hearings, exposing students to a variety of legal systems and procedural frameworks (Arsenijević 2024, 188–189). The Applied Science Private University in Jordan has evolved its teaching model from scripted mock trials to fully competitive moot court trials featuring self-prepared arguments and live adjudications. A survey revealed that 96% of alumni reported significant benefits from this transformation (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 266–268). Meanwhile, at Sanda University in China, moot court serves as a student-centered, interactive, and ability-driven learning module that integrates legal knowledge, advocacy skills, and professional ethics into a cohesive process (Jiang 2024, 12–13).

Across these examples, the educational goals and methods vary by region: African moot courts train students to synthesize complex factual and legal issues within a single argument (Heyns et al. 2008, 34–35); Indonesian moots teach students to analyze evidence using authentic judgments (Suartha and Martha 2020, 105); the ZAC model combines international law with negotiation-style simulations (Munin and Efron 2017, 327–328); Brazilian TBL moots emphasize the use of advanced research tools for case preparation (Santana et al. 2019, 9009–9010); Niš focuses on written and oral advocacy aligned with procedural standards (Arsenijević 2024, 189–190); and Sanda University emphasizes skill cultivation through integrated, performance-based evaluation (Jiang 2024, 12–14).

Importantly, these programs also promote cross-cultural dialogue and intercultural understanding. Both the African and Inter-American moot court competitions are conducted in multilingual environments that require students to adapt to varying legal traditions and systems

(Gerber and Castan 2013, 303, 305). The African moots, in particular, unite participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, encouraging collaboration across differences (Heyns et al. 2008, 24–25). In Indonesia, moot competitions further bridge legal education with social realities, prompting students to frame their arguments in the context of contemporary societal issues (Suartha and Martha 2020, 107).

The ZAC model, on the other hand, provides safe and structured debate spaces for students from conflicting cultural or ideological backgrounds, encouraging respectful dialogue and critical engagement (Munin and Efron 2017, 315–316, 330). At the University of Niš, participants gain procedural fluency across multiple legal regimes, developing adaptability and an understanding of comparative legal systems (Arsenijević 2024, 195–198).

Motivational factors for student participation in these simulation-based programs vary across contexts. In the African Human Rights Moot Court, motivation often arises from peer recognition and the pursuit of team success (Heyns et al. 2008, 36–37). In Indonesia, career readiness serves as the primary incentive, as students view moot court participation as direct preparation for professional practice (Suartha and Martha 2020, 106). In Brazil, students are drawn to the gamified, challenge-based structure that transforms legal research into an engaging and competitive learning experience (Santana et al. 2019, 9010–9011). At Niš, the prestige of the competition—enhanced by the involvement of high-profile judges and public final rounds—drives strong student engagement (Arsenijević 2024, 197–198). Similarly, alumni of the Applied Science Private University in Jordan have advocated making moot court a core course due to its clear practical benefits and impact on employability (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 269).

These methods also prove effective in contexts where jurisprudence is underdeveloped or legal issues are politically sensitive. The African Human Rights Moot Court presents students with realistic cases that lack established national precedents, prompting them to engage in creative legal reasoning (Heyns et al. 2008, 301). The ZAC model employs fictionalized versions of real-world disputes, allowing participants to address controversial themes without referencing actual parties or governments (Munin and Efron 2017, 320–322). In Brazil, moot court participants are encouraged to select their own socially relevant issues, but must present them through a neutral, analytically balanced perspective (Santana et al. 2019, 9009–9010).

The long-term impacts of these moot court programs are substantial and far-reaching. The African Moot Court has fostered a continent-wide network of human rights–oriented legal professionals and academics (Heyns et al. 2008, 33). Alumni of the Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court demonstrate strong proficiency in multinational litigation and cross-jurisdictional reasoning (Gerber and Castan 2013, 307). Graduates of Indonesian moot courts emerge as adaptable, socially engaged practitioners with a deep awareness of community-centered legal challenges (Suartha and Martha 2020, 110). Likewise, participants in Brazil's TBL-based moot courts consistently develop sustainable research and writing competencies that serve as foundational skills for their future legal careers (Santana et al. 2019, 9013–9014).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study suggest that simulation-based learning, particularly roleplay and moot courts, is an effective pedagogical intervention in human rights education. However, its effectiveness is highly context-dependent and largely depends on the facilitator's skill. When applied successfully, this approach transcends the traditional lecture model by immersing students in experiential situations that demand active engagement with legal concepts, ethical dilemmas, and divergent perspectives (Gerber and Castan 2013, 301).

Roleplay exercises require students to embody marginalized or opposing characters, thereby challenging preconceptions and fostering more ethical reflection (Sutton and Buis 2023, 1107). However, this power introduces a paradox: the emotional intensity of simulations can either deepen learning or provoke resistance as students reconcile new experiences with preexisting beliefs. Case examples, such as the Jordanian moot court program, demonstrate significant skill development (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 268–269). However, they also raise a critical question: can simulations truly dismantle ideological resistance, or do they merely train students to articulate human rights arguments without internalizing their moral foundations?

The facilitator's role is therefore crucial. Drawing on Freirean principles, the facilitator should not act as a mere transmitter of knowledge but as a critical co-investigator who fosters a dialogic environment in which students question oppressive structures embedded in law and society (Freire 1970, 80). Effective simulations must extend beyond procedural guidance; they require skilled moderators who can manage contentious debates, encourage authentic engagement, and guide reflective discussions that promote systemic critique (Ringel 2004, 461–462). This process can catalyze what Mezirow terms a "transformative learning" experience, where deeply held assumptions are challenged and reexamined, leading to a more inclusive and self-aware worldview (Fleming 2018, 121–124). Without this critical reflection, simulations risk devolving into empty exercises, which Schön criticizes as "technical rationality" devoid of transformation (Schön 1983, 49–76). For instance, while moot courts may excel at teaching appellate advocacy, if detached from discussions about power relations within legal systems, they risk turning human rights practice into a purely rhetorical exercise.

The study's limitations, stemming primarily from its reliance on secondary data, raise questions about whether simulations can effectively shift attitudes in deeply resistant contexts. Although the literature suggests that roleplay can "neutralize" ideological conflict by depersonalizing arguments (Munin and Efron 2017, 317), this notion invites a provocative counterpoint. In cultures where communal or religious values prioritize obligations over individual rights, simulations may unintentionally reinforce Western legal paradigms unless carefully adapted to local epistemologies.

Ultimately, the results underscore the tension between simulation as a pedagogical tool and as a form of political engagement. Their transformative potential is most evident when designed as "critical simulations," spaces where students are not only encouraged to interrogate legal doctrine but also to examine the structural inequities underlying rights violations (Gerber and Castan 2013, 301–302). To achieve this, educators must move beyond the technical limitations of courtroom procedures and instead design simulations that help students

recognize the gap between human rights ideals and their practical realization. Future research should examine whether these methods can truly subvert, rather than merely address, the ideological resistance they seek to confront.

Theoretical Implications

This research provides important theoretical contributions to the understanding of simulation-based learning in legal and human rights education. The findings indicate that this teaching method profoundly influences how students comprehend human rights principles by transforming abstract concepts into concrete, debatable experiences (Kolb 1984, 30–31, 33–34).

Essentially, these approaches create a safe space in which students can explore and test different viewpoints while temporarily setting aside their personal beliefs (Arsenijević 2024, 191). However, this study also uncovers a deeper tension: simulations reveal not only the strengths but also the limitations of the universal human rights framework when confronted with diverse cultural perspectives. Theoretically, this presents a challenge to traditional models of legal education. Simulations do more than teach human rights law—they demonstrate how such laws function in practice, exposing their gaps, contradictions, and intersections with real-world contexts (Schön 1983, 49–76). This experiential approach enables students to grasp the complex interrelationship among legal principles, power dynamics, and implementation processes (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 267–269).

The study suggests several directions for further theoretical development. Most urgently, there is a need for frameworks that explain how simulation-based learning operates in resistant environments. Future research could examine whether these strategies can genuinely transform ideological opposition or merely make existing divisions more visible. In either case, they provide valuable insights into the teaching of human rights in an increasingly pluralistic world.

Practical Implications for Educators

The findings of this study have several important practical implications for educators implementing simulation-based learning in human rights and legal education. To begin with, simulations should be intentionally integrated into the curriculum as progressive learning experiences rather than treated as isolated activities. Starting with simpler roleplays on less sensitive topics allows students to build foundational skills before progressing to more complex moot court exercises involving culturally sensitive human rights cases (Gerber and Castan 2012, 301). This scaffolding approach helps students develop confidence as they gradually engage with more challenging material.

Educators should clearly articulate how each simulation aligns with specific learning objectives, ensuring that it advances not only legal knowledge but also higher-order skills such as ethical reasoning, perspective-taking, and professional advocacy. The Jordanian case study illustrates the particular benefit of making such exercises compulsory rather than optional, as mandatory participation ensures that all students fully engage in the experiential learning process (Abu Issa et al. 2023, 268–270).

Effective facilitation is equally essential for successful implementation. Educators must move beyond merely monitoring procedural aspects and instead guide the learning experience

in a participatory and skillful manner. This involves setting clear ground rules that foster a safe environment for discussing sensitive issues, asking strategic questions that provoke deeper thinking, and recognizing moments when students may be engaging superficially so they can be redirected toward more meaningful reflection. The research highlights the importance of facilitators maintaining a balanced dual role as both content experts and process guides, providing factual structure while remaining open to diverse perspectives (Schön 1983, 49–76). This delicate balance ensures that simulations do not devolve into overly rigid doctrinal exercises or unstructured debates lacking educational value. However, contextual adaptation emerges as a second critical consideration, especially in contexts where human rights concepts are resisted. There are many strategies that educators can use to increase relevance and reduce defensiveness, including cultural bridging, perspective rotation and gradual exposure (Arsenijević 2024, 14). A UK study on mediation modules demonstrates the effectiveness of employing locally relevant case materials in student engagement and reducing ideological resistance considerably (Waters 2016, 178). Creating region-specific simulation banks that incorporate both universal principles and local tensions may help educators adapt their content to their own classroom contexts.

Simulation-based learning also necessitates equal innovation in assessment methods. Traditional grading rubrics do not usually reflect the full range of skills developed through these exercises. Formative feedback needs to cover both substantive mastery and process learning; students must consider what changes they could make to arguments for different cultural settings or audiences. This overall assessment approach better reflects what sophisticated learning outcomes simulations aim to achieve.

Resource constraints are indeed a challenge, but not by any means a barrier to implementation. There are some practical solutions, such as using technology via recorded roleplay or a virtual moot court, collaborative efforts with local legal entities for reality-based support, and simulation kits that are versatile, with a facilitator guide that provides detailed instructions. The Swedish case study of low-cost tax law roleplays shows that well-designed roleplays do not require a high level of resources to be effective (Karlstad University 2019). Teachers in resource-scarce environments should aim to maximize quality rather than quantity when building just a few simulations that have maximum impact and address the most important learning objectives.

A phased implementation approach can support the successful adoption of simulation methods. Starting with a needs assessment to identify students' backgrounds and points of resistance helps create a tailored design. If pilot testing among willing student volunteers is successful, full integration of the curriculum can proceed. Continued monitoring of skill development promotes the method's value and supports continued improvement. This evidence-based implementation strategy turns human rights education from abstract talk into a lived experience, preparing students to navigate legal systems while being aware of their cultural contingencies and constraints. The end goal is not ideological conversion, but the creation of legal professionals able to critically engage with rights implementation across varied contexts, ready to confront the promise and perils of human rights work in a world that is becoming increasingly complex.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that a transformational approach to human rights education can be achieved through simulation-based learning in value-diverse or resistant settings. Such techniques help students bridge the gap between abstract legal principles and practical application (Kolb 1984, 37–38). This form of teaching leads to stronger cognitive and affective learning outcomes, including improved legal reasoning, empathy, and critical reflection, compared with lecture-based methods (Sutton & Buis 2023, 1098). One major strength of simulations lies in their capacity to provide a neutral environment for exploring controversial issues. Students use roleplay or moot courts to engage with human rights concepts without being required to explicitly endorse them, thereby reducing ideological resistance and fostering open discussion (Gerber and Castan 2012, 309; Heyns et al. 2008, 23). This is particularly useful in classrooms where human rights norms are viewed as foreign or culturally incompatible.

Nevertheless, the study also highlights significant challenges. Cultural and ideological resistance can undermine the effectiveness of simulations unless they are carefully adapted to the local context. Moreover, skilled facilitation is essential for the successful use of these methods. Without proper guidance, simulations risk becoming superficial exercises that fail to provoke meaningful reflection or systemic critique (Schön 1983, 205–235).

Ultimately, the research emphasizes that simulations serve dual purposes: as educational tools for skill development and as platforms for engaging with the limitations of human rights paradigms. The study concludes that simulation-based learning not only enhances engagement but also has the potential to transform learners' moral reasoning and empathy, consistent with transformative learning theory. Future research should empirically test these findings through controlled classroom studies comparing simulation-based modules with traditional lectures over time to measure attitudinal and ethical change. Additionally, empirical anchoring, including meta-analyses of existing data, could substantiate claims about simulation efficacy across cultural contexts. Incorporating diverse case studies from non-Western legal education systems would further address the decolonization dimension of human rights teaching. Although simulations are not a cure-all for intellectual resistance, their ability to foster empathy, adaptability, and reflective practice makes them invaluable in preparing future legal professionals to navigate complex and contested rights landscapes.

Simulation-based learning has strong potential to advance human rights education, especially in contexts where traditional approaches may face resistance. It promotes active learning and critical thinking by immersing students in real-world legal scenarios, both of which are essential for developing a deeper understanding of human rights law. For educators, ensuring that simulations are culturally sensitive and legally relevant is a key priority. Teachers should also pursue training opportunities to help them effectively guide students through simulations and expand their pedagogical range.

Future research should further explore the theoretical applications of simulation-based learning in specific educational contexts, particularly where human rights education faces substantial challenges. Beyond theoretical exploration, empirical validation remains crucial. Structured classroom observations, educator interviews, and student reflections can provide measurable evidence of transformation in resistant environments. Primary research through case

studies and interviews with educators and learners will offer valuable insights into the effectiveness and limitations of simulation-based practices in real-world settings.

Finally, this study suggests that, despite its limitations, simulation-based learning can play a pivotal role in reshaping how human rights are taught, enhancing both theoretical understanding and practical skills vital to future human rights advocates and legal professionals.

CONTRIBUTOR

The author contributed solely to the intellectual discourse that forms the foundation of this article, as well as its writing and editing, and assumes full responsibility for its content and interpretation.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Acknowledgments:
Not applicable.

Funding:
Not applicable.

AI Declaration:
The authors acknowledge the use of AI tools—specifically ChatGPT-5—to assist in translating and enhancing the clarity and quality of the English language in this manuscript. These AI tools were employed solely for language refinement and were not involved in the conceptualization, analysis, or development of the scientific content. The authors assume full responsibility for the manuscript's originality, accuracy, validity, and integrity.

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Not applicable.

Disclosure statement:
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author/s.

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