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Teaching International Law in a Shifting Geopolitical Order: Implications for Social Justice Education

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Abstract

This article examines how geopolitical shifts in public international law shape social justice education. Using document-based qualitative analysis across four illustrative domains: the United Nations (UN) response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, EU legal alignment in the Western Balkans, post-COVID-19 global health governance, and East Asian maritime disputes, the study develops a conceptual framework linking evolving legal norms to curriculum aims, pedagogy, and system supports. Findings indicate that while the language of international norms is clear due to treaties, resolutions, and adjudications, their implementation varies across actor constellations, institutional capacities, and degrees of political contestation. This model prescribes educational source-based inquiry, competency-aligned assessment, and partnerships drawing classrooms into the real legal-civic process when working where inclusion or equity and information integrity are matters of contestation. The research concludes with implementable steps towards infusing the elements of international law literacy into teaching and learning through participatory pedagogies founded on evidence-informed reasoning.

Keywords: civic competencies, source-based inquiry, curriculum mapping, global citizenship learning, teacher professional development

1. Introduction

Geopolitical conflict, pandemic governance, regional integration, and maritime disputes are increasingly framing the rights, duties, and public narratives with which citizens are filled by education, making them so immediately involved (Almakky, 2023). These issues are no longer confined to closed-door discussions in diplomacy or courts; instead, they are now determining the content of school and university curricula related to civic participation, social inclusion, and human rights, all grounded in evidence-based public reasoning. However important shifts in public international law may be to this end, they tend to be filtered down to educational audiences as doctrinal abstractions from a distance that reinforce rather than fill the very gap between changing international norms and the practical content needs of social justice education, where misinformation, polarization, and unequal institutional capacity work against learners' opportunities to participate on fair terms (Reinold, 2011). This article uses the debates that are currently underway in public international law and geopolitics to inform itself; however, it is directed mainly toward an audience of social science and education scholars and practitioners. It attempts not a doctrinal translation but rather an exercise in the pedagogical translation of evolving international norms into curriculum-relevant content, civic competencies, and inclusive teaching practices. By focusing on educational applications such as source-based inquiry, evidence-informed reasoning, and democratic participation, the article treats international law as a practical resource for social justice education rather than a purely technical legal field.

This article addresses the gap by treating international legal change as a pedagogical and social-policy resource. It asks how contested international norms can be translated into (i) teachable curriculum content, (ii) civic competencies for democratic culture (e.g., deliberation, claims-evidence reasoning, media and information literacy), and (iii) implementation supports such as teacher professional development, assessment design, and school-community partnerships (Council of Europe, 2018; OECD, 2019). To make this translation concrete, the analysis draws on a document-based qualitative comparative synthesis across four illustrative domains. Firstly, the UN response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine foregrounds sovereignty, territorial integrity, and accountability, thereby raising questions about how learners appreciate the process of weighing competing claims and the institutional limits in international governance (United Nations General Assembly, 2014). Secondly, EU legal alignment in the Western Balkans, taking Albania into particular consideration, provides real-time context for teaching the rule of law, anti-corruption, and democratic participation as issues of governance that are lived experiences rather than occupying an abstract principle (Börzel, 2016). Third, post-COVID-19 global health governance demonstrates how legal obligations and equity, capacity constraints, and information integrity interplay, thereby making it useful when applying public health literacy and ethical reasoning in debates on social policies (World Health Organization, 2016; Kavanagh, 2023a; Kavanagh, 2023b). Fourth, East

Asian maritime disputes provide an illustration of treaty interpretation and adjudication alongside sustainability trade-offs, which can be used to merge civic and environmental reasoning through a structured inquiry involving primary sources (United Nations, 1982; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016).

Conceptually, the mapping framework that this article develops and applies maps legal change onto education via three channels: the content of norms (rights, obligations, legitimacy), competencies and pedagogies (deliberation, source evaluation, media literacy), and system supports (teacher learning, resources, assessment, partnerships). Methodologically, a version of document-based qualitative analysis was applied to the most authoritative legal and policy texts available across the four domains and synthesized cross-case patterns to actionable implications for curriculum and practice (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

The study is guided by three research questions:

(RQ1) In what concrete ways do geopolitical shifts in international law generate curricular content and civic competencies relevant to social justice education?

(RQ2) How can the four domains be used as case-based contexts for teaching and learning?

(RQ3) What system-level supports are needed to translate legal change into sustained educational practice?

The major objective is to emphasize how valuable the knowledge of international law is as a significant aspect of social science education, which fosters inclusive learning by examining and nurturing informed civic thinking, offering a structure for adjudicating curricula and teacher development.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Public international law as contested governance

Public international law is widely described as a system whose norms are articulated through treaties, resolutions, and adjudication, yet whose interpretation and compliance are shaped by power, institutional design, and political incentives. Scholarship demonstrates the way international organizations codify and monitor standards, the way courts and tribunals clarify obligations through authoritative interpretation, and the extent to which compliance is uneven in the absence of strong enforcement mechanisms or where such mechanisms are geopolitically contested (Benvenisti & Downs, 2009; Daugirdas, 2019; Maluwa, 2020). Increasingly more non-state actors and transnational networks exert influence on agenda-setting, norm diffusion, and accountability, particularly in multi-actor regimes for instance, a global health governance regime. Taken together, this would work to establish the fact that international norms are not static rules but rather evolving reference points that structure the public claims of rights, responsibilities, and legitimacy.

2.2 Social justice education, inclusion, and civic competencies in global contexts

Education research highlights that social justice education and related approaches (e.g., global citizenship education and democratic culture frameworks) seek to develop learners' capacities to participate in plural societies, understand rights and responsibilities, and address structural inequalities through informed and ethical public reasoning (Council of Europe, 2018; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). Competencies include deliberation, perspective-taking, critical evaluation of information, and the ability to justify claims with evidence. Factual knowledge is what competencies share at most. They become particularly salient in the circumstances of polarization and strife and misinformation because competing narratives shape public debates on issues of security, migration, equity, and sustainability (UNESCO, 2021). From here, it also follows that international norms matter educationally since they are widely referenced standards often disputed through which social inclusion and human rights, as well as the legitimacy of policies, are argued in public life.

2.3 Bridging the gap: international law literacy as a pedagogical resource

Despite robust scholarship on international law and strong normative frameworks in education, comparatively little research connects evolving international legal norms to concrete educational design questions: What should learners be able to do with international legal texts? How can curriculum aims be translated into teachable content, authentic tasks, and competency-aligned assessment? A growing body of practice-oriented civic education supports the use of source-based inquiry and structured discussion to help learners evaluate contested claims, distinguish evidence from opinion, and reason about institutional constraints (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). However, the "translation step" from geopolitical-legal change to curriculum content, classroom pedagogy, and system supports (teacher learning, assessment, and partnerships) remains underdeveloped in the literature addressed to social science and education audiences. The gap shows most in contexts where international legal changes directly intersect with inclusion matters like human rights safety, rule-of-law shifts, public health fairness, and environmental management yet seldom get used as teachable resources in a systematic way. Comparative work on transitional justice in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia also underlines how accountability and reconciliation plans link with institutional trust and inclusion dimensions that social justice education must cover through evidence-informed and dialogic pedagogy (Dedej et al., 2024).

2.4 Positioning and contribution of this article

This article addresses the above gap by treating international legal developments as pedagogically relevant resources and by proposing a mapping framework that links legal norm change to (i) curriculum-relevant content, (ii) civic competencies and participatory pedagogies, and (iii) implementation supports at school and system levels. Using a document-based qualitative comparative analysis across four illustrative domains, it aims to make international law literacy usable for social justice

education through source-based inquiry, claims–evidence reasoning assessment, and connections to authentic civic processes.

3. Conceptual framework

From legal norms to educational design This study applies a translation-oriented framework that connects developments in public international law with concrete educational design choices, meant here as social justice education. In international legal scholarship, the processes of creating, interpreting, and complying with norms are typically analysed at the level of states and institutions. In education research, the focus is on how knowledge, values, and competencies are cultivated through curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and system supports. To bridge these levels, the framework treats geopolitical-legal change as a set of inputs that can be mapped into educational outputs.

3.1 Framework inputs: what counts as “legal change” for educational purposes

Across domains, international law generates three analytically distinct inputs that are visible in authoritative documents (treaties, resolutions, judgments/awards, and monitoring reports):

- Normative content: the rights, obligations, principles, and legitimacy claims articulated in legal and institutional texts (e.g., sovereignty, accountability, equity, and rule of law).
- Contestation and evidence demands mean the level to which interpretation and public justification norms are disputed, requiring an examination of how claims are supported, challenged, or reframed through competing sources.
- Implementation architecture: the mechanisms that shape compliance and practice (monitoring, conditionality, reporting duties, dispute settlement, capacity-building), including the roles of states, international organizations, courts, and non-state actors.

These inputs are treated not as abstract doctrine but as teachable materials and processes that structure real-world civic debates and inclusion-relevant outcomes.

3.2 Translation pathway: from inputs to educational outputs

The framework converts the above inputs into four education-facing outputs: Curriculum content and learning outcomes (what to learn): translating normative content into curriculum-relevant statements (e.g., “students explain how international obligations are articulated and contested” or “students analyse equity trade-offs in global governance”). Competencies and pedagogies (how to learn): selecting competencies implied by contested governance (e.g., deliberation, ethical reasoning, media and information literacy, claims–evidence–reasoning), and pairing them with participatory approaches such as source-based inquiry, structured controversy, simulations, and project-based learning (Council of Europe, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). Assessment competencies are mapped through authentic tasks such

as annotated document analysis, evidence-based position papers, and policy briefs, plus a deliberation rubric. The system supports (what enables implementation): identifying what teachers and schools need to deliver the above professional development, curated document packs, guidance for sensitive topics, and partnerships with civic/legal institutions.

3.3 Operational use across cases: the mapping rules

Operationally, the framework functions as a mapping tool applied consistently across the four illustrative domains. For each domain, the analysis:

- a) identifies the key authoritative documents and extracts the central normative claims;
- b) codes the main contestation dynamics (interpretive disputes, misinformation risks, legitimacy conflicts);
- c) codes the implementation architecture (monitoring, enforcement limits, capacity constraints, dispute settlement);
- d) maps these patterns into curriculum outcomes, suggested learning tasks, assessment formats, and required supports.

This approach ensures that the paper’s educational recommendations follow transparently from the legal–policy evidence, strengthening relevance for social science education audiences and supporting the design of inclusion-oriented civic learning.

Input 1: Normative content (rights, duties, principles)	Input 2: Contestation & evidence demands (competing claims, disputes, misinfo) ↓	Input 3: Implementation architecture (monitoring, conditionality, adjudication, capacity)
Curriculum outcomes (what to learn)	Competencies & pedagogies (how to learn) ↓ System supports (teacher PD, resources, partnerships)	Assessment & implementation structures (how to show learning)

Table 1. summarises the mapping framework used in the analysis

Table 1. From legal change to educational design: a mapping framework. Authoritative legal–policy documents are analysed to identify (i) normative content, (ii) contestation and evidence demands, and (iii) implementation architecture; these

dimensions are then translated into curriculum outcomes, competencies and pedagogies, assessment structures, and system supports for inclusive social justice education.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This study applies a document-based qualitative comparative design to examine how geopolitical shifts shaping public international law can be translated into implications for social justice education. The approach combines structured document analysis with cross-case synthesis to identify recurring patterns of norm articulation, contestation, and implementation, and to map these patterns onto curriculum-relevant content, civic competencies, and system supports for educational practice (Bowen, 2009; Gerring, 2017; Miles et al., 2014). The analysis is interpretive and explanatory rather than causal, with the aim of producing a usable mapping framework for education-focused readers. The unit of analysis is the authoritative legal-policy document (e.g., treaties, UN resolutions, court judgments/awards, and monitoring/progress reports). Across the four domains, the overall corpus comprised approximately 60–80 distinct sources (after deduplication and consolidation of closely related versions/annexes), including primary legal-policy documents and peer-reviewed scholarship used for contextualization and triangulation. Approximate domain-level coverage was as follows: UN/Ukraine ($n \approx 14-21$), EU/Western Balkans with attention to Albania ($n \approx 17-21$), post-COVID-19 global health governance ($n \approx 16-23$), and East Asian maritime governance ($n \approx 12-18$).

4.2 Case selection and scope

Four illustrative domains were purposively selected to maximize variation in issue area, actor constellations, and governance levels, while retaining a consistent focus on norm change and its educational salience:

1. the UN response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (sovereignty, territorial integrity, accountability);
2. EU legal alignment in the Western Balkans, with attention to Albania (rule of law, conditionality, institutional reform);
3. post-COVID-19 global health governance (equity, capacity, reporting duties, information integrity); and
4. East Asian maritime governance (treaty interpretation, adjudication, sustainability, and conflict resolution).

These domains are treated as pedagogically useful contexts rather than an exhaustive survey of international law.

4.3 Data sources and document collection

The corpus consists of publicly available primary legal-policy documents and peer-reviewed secondary scholarship. Primary sources include treaties and treaty-related instruments, UN resolutions, selected international court or tribunal outputs (judgments/awards/advisory opinions where relevant), EU legal instruments and country progress reports, and official publications by organizations such as the UN, EU, and WHO. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books that support contextual interpretation and triangulation.

Inclusion criteria were (i) direct relevance to one of the four domains; (ii) authoritative provenance (official institutional source) or peer review; (iii) publication in English; and (iv) temporal relevance primarily between 2005 and 2025, with foundational earlier texts included where necessary. Documents were retrieved from institutional repositories and scholarly databases. For transparency, all items were recorded in a document log (source type, year, issuing body/publisher, domain allocation, and analytic notes), providing an audit trail for retrieval and coding decisions (Bowen, 2009).

Domain	Approx. number of sources (n)	Typical sources
UN/Ukraine	14–21	UN resolutions/statements, selected judicial outputs, peer-reviewed analyses
EU/WB (Albania focus)	17–21	EU instruments & EC reports; national reform documents; peer-reviewed analyses
Global health	16–23	WHO/IHR instruments & reports; policy texts; peer-reviewed analyses
Maritime governance	12–18	UNCLOS-related instruments, arbitral/judicial outputs, peer-reviewed analyses

Table 2. Overview of the corpus

Note. Counts are approximate and refer to distinct sources after consolidation/deduplication; a document log was maintained as an audit trail.

4.4 Analytical protocol: coding and cross-case synthesis

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive coding captured document attributes (type, date, issuing body, and domain). Second, analytical coding focused on the framework’s three legal-governance inputs: (a) normative content (rights/obligations/principles), (b) contestation and evidence demands (interpretive disputes, competing claims, information integrity challenges), and (c) implementation architecture (monitoring, conditionality, dispute settlement,

capacity constraints, and actor roles). Third, coded findings were mapped onto education-facing outputs: curriculum outcomes, competencies/pedagogies, assessment formats, and system supports (teacher learning, resources, partnerships). Cross-case comparison was then used to identify convergences and divergences across domains.

4.5 Trustworthiness and limitations

Triangulation across institutional documents and peer-reviewed sources, audit trail (document log and analytic memos), and attention to disconfirming evidence where documents or interpretations diverged supported trustworthiness. Limitations are that it uses publicly available documents (no interviews or classroom observation), context-dependent interpretive findings intended for analytic generalization rather than statistical inference, and design-oriented educational implications whose feasibility depends on local curricula, teacher capacity, and institutional constraints.

4.6 Ethics statement

This study uses publicly available documents and secondary literature and involves no human participants or personal data; formal ethics approval was therefore not required.

5. Discoveries and Main Themes

Across the four domains, three patterns repeat themselves in the document corpus directly for social justice education. First, international norms are usually crystallized with formal clarity in authoritative texts (typical treaties, resolutions, progress reports, and awards) by standards that can be identified for public reasoning about rights, obligations, and legitimacy. Secondly, implementation and compliance vary markedly across different contexts according to capacity, incentives, institutional design, and political contestation. Thirdly, the roles of actors states, international organizations, courts/tribunals, and non-state actors interrelate dynamically in the interpretation, monitoring, and contestation of how norms are interpreted, monitored, and contested. These patterns are translated below into case-based learning opportunities and design implications for curriculum pedagogy assessment.

5.1 UN response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: norm affirmation under enforcement constraints

Authoritative UN documents restate the main principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, showing how legal norms are formulated in cases of extreme geopolitical conflicts. For example, UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 provides a very clear reference point on how to frame and reaffirm territorial integrity through multilateral institutional processes (United Nations General Assembly, 2014). At the same time, the corpus highlights limits of enforcement and the political constraints affecting collective security responses, pointing to a recurring gap between declaratory norm-setting and compliance outcomes (Hilde, 2024). Educational translation. This domain

sustains international law literacy by working straight from primary sources and assisting students to analyse institutional constraints without reducing the topic to partisan narratives. Source-based inquiry tasks can ask learners to distinguish (i) the legal claim made in a resolution, (ii) the institutional mechanism available for enforcement, and (iii) the forms of evidence used in public justification. Suitable assessments include annotated document analyses and claims–evidence reasoning essays on accountability and legitimacy.

5.2 EU legal alignment in the Western Balkans (Albania focus): rule-of-law standards as lived governance

The EU's enlargement and neighborhood instruments prioritize legal alignment and institutional reforms first in general democratic governance and then specific principles of the rule of law, accountability, and anti-corruption. Recent regional research finds that apart from being formally conditioned by accession criteria, the prospect for membership of countries in the Western Balkans is increasingly heavily mediated through new geopolitical realities, thus allowing for more complex domestic interpretation of benchmarks pertaining to issues such as the rule of law (Teqja et al., 2025). Country- and region-focused analyses frame Albania-Kosovo cooperation within broader European integration efforts; this framing gives locally meaningful entry points for curriculum-linked civic learning (Lusha, 2024 a). The European Commission supplies content for progress reporting and a domain-specific benchmark, that is to say, narratives of implementation progress and constraints plus an insightful look at how legal norms travel through conditionality and domestic reform processes (European Commission, 2023; Cerioli, 2024). Educational translation. This domain offers an applied context of civic education related to the learner's immediate governance environment. Curriculum activities may include the mapping of EU benchmarks onto local public administration challenges and transparency and accountability mechanism analysis, as well as short evidence-based policy briefs. Pedagogically, project-based learning can connect classroom inquiry to public information sources (reports, indicators, official statements) while foregrounding ethical trade-offs and inclusion-oriented outcomes.

5.3 Post-COVID-19 Global Health Governance: Responsibilities, Fairness, and Trustworthy Information

Global health instruments articulate surveillance, reporting, and response coordination obligations, while post-COVID-19 governance debates sustain inequities in capacity and access (Kavanagh, 2023a, 2023b). The International Health Regulations offer a legal baseline for state duties in preparedness and reporting, while pandemic-era coordination initiatives demonstrate multi-actor governance under conditions of scarcity and unequal institutional capacity (World Health Organization, 2016; UNESCO, 2021). A cross-document pattern is the gap often found between the level of investment in infrastructure and political trust to actualize the stated commitments whereby financing has taken place (Chernykh & Volodin, 2024). This

has been the particularly strong leg of combining social policy, inclusion, and civic reasoning. Students may study how obligations are framed, note the equity being operationalized (or not), and observe misinformation running compliance and social cohesion. Appropriate tasks include evaluating the credibility of competing sources and producing data-informed briefs on equitable response options and reflective writing on ethical reasoning as it applies to evidence from documentaries.

5.4 East Asian maritime governance: treaty interpretation, adjudication, and sustainability trade-offs

Maritime governance documents demonstrate the way in which treaty frameworks structure competing claims and the way in which adjudication clarifies competing legal arguments even if compliance with a judgment is not assured. The UNCLOS sets the background maritime entitlements and obligations of all states, while adjudicatory outputs such as the 2016 award provide very concrete ways in which interpretive conclusions are justified and how claims can be delimited by a tribunal (United Nations, 1982; Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). Thus, this corpus further brings to light the fact that purely legal solutions are complicated by environmental sustainability and resource governance, thereby necessitating trade-offs between sovereignty on one hand and development and ecological stewardship on the other hand (Mayer, 2022). It is also through geopolitical contest that partnerships are framed and competing legitimacy claims are made across regions. These are the narratives by which international norms come to be either defended or contested publicly (Tunkin, 1993).

Educational translation. This domain fits a deliberative and simulation-based pedagogy. Learners may try provisions of the treaty, evaluate the structure of arguments in the award, and role-play negotiation positions within constraints of legal texts as well as sustainability criteria that have to be met. Possible assessments include evidence-based position papers and structured negotiation reflections mapped to explicit rubrics.

5.5 Comparative actor roles across domains

States translate their international commitments into domestic legislation, administrative reform, and enforcement practice. They remain central to all these cases because they are core as treaty-makers and primary implementers. International organizations assist by codification, monitoring and reporting systems, standard-setting, and conditionality mechanisms where applied in some regimes (Hörnle, 2018). Courts and tribunals will provide authoritative interpretation and adjudication to create a focal point or even sometimes coordination for argumentation. Expertise, advocacy, documentation, and accountability functions belong to non-state actors who are important in multi-actor regimes where the implementation relies on coalitions.

Actor category	Core roles	Main mechanisms	Illustrative examples
States	Treaty-making; domestic implementation and compliance choices	Negotiation, ratification, legislation, enforcement, coalitions/sanctions	Support/opposition patterns around UNGA 68/262; reforms aligned with EU benchmarks
International organisations	Codification, monitoring, coordination, and standard-setting	Resolutions; reporting; benchmarks; conditionality; capacity-building	UN resolutions, EC progress reports, WHO instruments, and guidance
Courts/tribunals	Interpretation, adjudication and clarification of claims	Judgments, awards; advisory opinions, and provisional measures	PCA award (2016); judicial/tribunal outputs referenced in domain documents
Non-state actors	Expertise, advocacy; accountability, and agenda setting	Documentation, campaigns, technical input, public-private initiatives	Health access initiatives; civil society monitoring and reporting

Table 3. Comparative roles of international actors

Note. Examples are illustrative; roles may overlap across contexts.

Source: Authors' compilation based on primary legal-policy documents and peer-reviewed scholarship cited in-text.

Table 3, gives this functional split of tasks by actor groups. While the tasks are so different, in practice they work together, and their effects vary by place and political setting. The chart is thus useful for comparison of how norms form and helps in making legal steps into learning uses.

6. Discussion: Implications for Social Justice Education Across Different Cases

Based on the four domains illustrated above, cross-case patterns are discussed here that help explain why international legal change matters for social justice education and how this can be translated into curriculum, pedagogy, and system supports. Three mechanisms recur across cases: (i) though formal norm articulation is very often textually clear, (ii) implementation and compliance let us add here variation in capacity as well as incentives and institutional design and (iii) contested

interpretation increases the demand for evidence to inform public reasoning where adjudication, monitoring, and information environments make certain acts of evidence appear as credible claims (United Nations General Assembly, 2014; European Commission, 2023; World Health Organization, 2016).

6.1 Norm clarity versus implementation variability

A consistent finding is the gap between the clarity with which norms are articulated in treaties, resolutions, and authoritative decisions and the unevenness of their implementation in practice. This gap is not a marginal detail; it is a core feature of how global governance works under geopolitical contestation. For education, this means learners need opportunities to distinguish between (a) what a legal text states, (b) which institution is empowered to act, and (c) what constraints political, economic, and administrative shape real-world outcomes. Translating this mechanism into classroom practice supports civic learning that is realistic about governance while remaining anchored in rights-based standards and inclusion-oriented aims.

6.2 Compliance architectures, capacity, and actor configurations

Across domains, compliance is shaped by institutional “architecture”: monitoring and reporting duties, conditionality and benchmarking, dispute settlement, and capacity-building arrangements. State actors fulfill and/or resist fulfillment of commitments; international organizations enunciate and monitor; courts/tribunals supply further specification on interpretive claims; and non-state actors supply expertise and accountability. They operate in a mutually interdependent relationship, but the degree of influence varies not only across issue areas but also political context (Benvenisti & Downs, 2009; European Commission, 2023; Wojcik, 2020). This further provides very concrete ground for curriculum units on rule of law, equity, and accountability that connect the global standard to local institutional reality. Governance reform trajectories are linked to human security and social cohesion dynamics in post-conflict contexts; these factors can take the form of educational divisions and unequal access to civic learning opportunities (Isufaj, 2025). Geopolitical competition also shapes the framing of partnerships and legitimacy across regions, influencing those narratives through which international norms are either publicly defended or contested. Narratives of crisis and the perception of public risk can be manipulated through influence operations and strategic communication outside the legal battles reinforcing the media literacy element in civic education. Just like narrative control, interpretation can be stabilized through authoritative reasoning and focal points for debate provided by adjudication and monitoring but here also, actual compliance would depend on the political alignments and incentives of a state (Lusha, 2024 b). This has a direct pedagogical function reiterating thus setting a place for media literacy, information literacy, and claims-evidence-reasoning as elements of democratic competence particularly so for inclusion-oriented civic

learning where learners have to maneuver contested narratives about rights, security, equity, and sustainability.

6.3 Contestation, adjudication, and information integrity

A third cross-case mechanism is that of interpretive contestation: the same norms can be invoked in justification for competing claims, particularly when geopolitical stakes are high and information environments remain polarized (Lippert & Mair, 2024). Geopolitical competition also shapes how partnerships and legitimacy claims are framed across regions, influencing the narratives through which international norms are either defended or contested publicly. In addition to legal contestation, influence operations may determine crisis narratives as well as public perception of risk hence, media and information literacy should form part of civic education (UNESCO, 2021; Hersman et al., 2022).

6.4 Design implications: curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and supports

Sustainability-related disputes highlight the governance of natural resources with international legal interpretation, thus providing an additional entry point for integrating environmental and civic reasoning in classroom inquiry. From an amalgamation of these mechanisms, four design implications are induced for social justice education. Therefore, curriculum planning has to explicitly map the international norms rights, obligations, legitimacy claims into learning outcomes that emphasize interpretation and application rather than remembrance. The pedagogy must prioritize source-based inquiry and structured deliberation, by which students will be enabled to work with authentic documents (treaty excerpts, resolutions, reports, awards) and practice evidence-based justification under conditions of disagreement. Competency-aligned assessment through authentic tasks annotated document analyses, policy briefs, simulation products, and reflective justifications should be supported by transparent rubrics measuring the use of sources, reasoning quality, and ethical judgement. Sustained implementation requires system supports: teacher professional development for working with primary legal sources, curated resource packs, guidance for sensitive topics, and partnerships with universities and civic institutions that can provide materials and feedback loops connecting classroom learning to real-world governance processes.

7. Conclusions

This article translates geopolitical and legal change into actionable implications for social justice education. Across the cases analysed, international norms are frequently articulated with textual clarity in authoritative documents, yet implementation varies widely due to capacity constraints, actor incentives, and political contestation. For education, this gap between norm-setting and practice is not merely descriptive; it provides a concrete basis for teaching governance literacy, inclusion-oriented civic reasoning, and the evaluation of contested public claims using evidence.

Three implications follow. *First*, social science curricula can strengthen international law literacy by explicitly mapping legal norms into learning outcomes and using authentic, source-based tasks that require claims–evidence–reasoning. *Second*, successful implementation requires sustained teacher professional learning and readily accessible resource supports to assist educators in working confidently with the primary legal and policy texts as well as guidance for working with sensitivity. *Third*, schools and education systems require cross-sector partnerships (for example, with universities and civic institutions) to supply real materials and feedback loops that support transparency, participation, and iterative improvement. Future research should apply these design principles through classroom-based implementations that are accompanied by a mixed-methods evaluation attentive to civic competence, information integrity, and equity-related outcomes.

8. Recommendations

At the end of the entire paper, we present a set of recommendations that transform the cross-case findings into actionable strategies for curriculum design, pedagogy, and development at a systemic level, with a particular focus on Albania and the Western Balkans.

8.1 Curriculum design: linking norms to learning outcomes

International legal skills should be integrated into social science subjects through short, source-based units, using accessible excerpts from treaties, resolutions, decisions, and official reports.

(i) rights and obligations, (ii) legitimacy and respect, and (iii) links between international commitments and domestic policy choices.

Connecting contemporary themes important for inclusion (rule of law, equality, accountability, information integrity, sustainability) to the civic environments lived by students.

Using source-based inquiry to guide students in distinguishing claims from evidence in important but contested public issues.

Assessment of competencies through authentic tasks: analysis of annotated documents, claim-evidence-reasoning essays, political reports, and structured simulations.

Designing transparent rubrics that measure resource use, quality of reasoning, perspective taking, and ethical judgment, supporting inclusion at all levels of classroom dialogue.

8.2 Teacher professional development and support resources

Promoting professional learning through short courses or micro-credentials, so that teachers maintain confidence in handling key legal-political texts, mixed sources, and competency-aligned assessments.

Issuing interim guidelines on sensitive or polarized issues to preserve academic neutrality and the well-being of learners.

8.3 Partnerships and coordination at the systemic level

Involve enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration among educational institutions, public entities, and civil society organizations for resource sharing and linking learning to actual civic processes.

Ethical safeguards and protections in addition to data protection and sensitivity content handling and classroom practices that ensure the diversity of perspectives and dignity of all students.

8.4 Applied Activities for Case Continuity

Learning may be linked to reality by applied activities such as:

- structured analysis of UN resolutions,
- local government projects linked to EU standards,
- data-informed reports on equitable health responses,
- negotiation simulations based on maritime governance.

These activities help students practice thinking like lawyers, using evidence, and discussing ideas in real-life situations.

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