



Judicial Considerations in Marriage Dispensation Cases at the Donggala Religious Court: Implications for Adolescent Character Formation and Legal Literacy

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Abstract:

Legal literacy plays an important role in equipping adolescents with legal knowledge, awareness of consequences, and the ability to make responsible decisions, particularly in relation to interpersonal relationships and marriage. Marriage dispensation cases provide an empirical context for identifying adolescent needs related to responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, legal awareness, and decision-making. This study aims to analyze the character and legal literacy dimensions reflected in judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases at the Donggala Religious Court. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews with a judge and a court clerk, supported by documentation of 45 marriage dispensation cases registered from 2024 to September 2026. The findings show that the main judicial considerations were closely related to circumstances such as pregnancy before marriage, highly intimate romantic relationships, the readiness of the prospective spouses, and the legal and social consequences of marriage. These considerations reflect the need to strengthen adolescents' responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, awareness of consequences, and mature decision-making. They also reveal the importance of legal literacy concerning the minimum marriage age, marriage dispensation, marital rights and obligations, and child protection. The main contribution of this study is to demonstrate that judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases can serve not only as a basis for legal decision-making but also as a contextual source for developing preventive character education and legal literacy for adolescents through schools, families, religious institutions, and communities.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Marriage dispensation remains a phenomenon that reflects the complexity of adolescent marriage in Indonesia (Dyah Listyorini, Arikha Saputra, & Fitika Andraini, 2022). Although Law Number 16 of 2019 establishes 19 years as the minimum age of marriage for both men and women, marriage below this age remains legally possible through a court-granted dispensation for very urgent reasons supported by sufficient evidence (Andriati, Sari, & Wulandari, 2022). As an exception to the statutory minimum age, its examination requires judicial caution and attention to the best interests of the child, as emphasized in Supreme Court Regulation Number 5 of 2019 (Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). In practice, applications often arise when adolescents are already facing difficult circumstances, including pregnancy before marriage or highly intimate romantic relationships. Marriage dispensation therefore lies at the intersection between child protection and the need to respond to social realities that have already occurred (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023; Karima, Rahma, Kasdi, & Nubahai, 2023).

A similar phenomenon was identified at the Donggala Religious Court, where granted marriage dispensation applications were associated, among other circumstances, with pregnancy before marriage and highly intimate romantic relationships between prospective spouses (Andini Puspita Sari, 2026). These circumstances demonstrate that the issue concerns not only compliance with the statutory minimum age but also adolescents' readiness to understand the consequences of their relationships and decisions. This is particularly important because adolescence is a developmental period in which self-control, emotional maturity, responsibility, and decision-making capacities continue to develop, whereas marriage requires psychological, social, educational, and economic readiness (Herawati, Yendra, & Amita, 2025). Insufficient readiness may contribute to school discontinuation, psychological pressure, economic difficulties, marital conflict, and vulnerability to divorce (Januari, 2023).

These circumstances highlight the importance of strengthening responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, mature decision-making, and awareness of consequences among adolescents (Denysenko, 2020). Pregnancy before marriage and highly intimate relationships indicate that the problem extends beyond the chronological age of prospective spouses to how adolescents understand behavioral boundaries, personal choices, and their consequences (Hilyasani, Najib, & Harahap, 2022). Preventive efforts should therefore prepare adolescents to manage interpersonal relationships and evaluate the potential consequences of their decisions before such circumstances require judicial intervention. In this context, the development of adolescent character needs to be accompanied by adequate legal understanding so that responsible behavior is supported by awareness of relevant legal norms and protections (Ulfah, Hidayah, & Safudin, 2023).

Several previous studies, Ulfah, Hidayah, and Safudin (2023) emphasize the importance of knowledge of legal substance and processes among younger generations (Ulfah et al., 2023), while Listyorini, Saputra, and Andraini (2022) and Batubara and Arifin (2020) demonstrate the role of legal education in strengthening students' legal awareness (Dyah Listyorini et al., 2022; Batubara & Arifin, 2020). Legal literacy is therefore most meaningful when adolescents are able to translate legal knowledge into self-control, awareness of risks, and responsible decision-making. Previous studies on marriage dispensation have predominantly examined judicial reasoning, family law, child protection, and the best interests of the child (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023; Karima, Rahma, Kasdi, & Nubahai, 2023), whereas studies on legal education have generally focused on legal knowledge and awareness in educational settings (Dyah Listyorini et al., 2022; Batubara & Arifin, 2020; Ulfah et al., 2023). Limited attention has been given to connecting the empirical circumstances and judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases with the character and legal literacy needs of adolescents. This connection constitutes the

novelty of the present study.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the values reflected in judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases at the Donggala Religious Court and examine their implications for strengthening adolescent character and legal literacy. The study does not assume that judicial decisions directly shape adolescents' character; rather, the circumstances of the cases and judicial considerations are used as an empirical basis for identifying preventive learning needs. While courts perform a corrective function after concrete problems emerge, legal literacy can serve a preventive function by equipping adolescents with legal knowledge, responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, and informed decision-making. The findings are expected to contribute to contextual preventive legal education involving schools, families, religious institutions, and communities.



Method (منهج)

This study was designed to explore judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases and their implications for adolescent character education and legal literacy. A qualitative approach was employed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the empirical circumstances surrounding marriage dispensation cases at the Donggala Religious Court. The method is organized into three components covering data collection and analysis procedures, participant characteristics, and research design.

Identify Subsections

Data were collected through interviews and documentation. Interviews focused on the circumstances underlying marriage dispensation applications, judicial considerations in deciding the cases, and aspects related to adolescents' readiness and the consequences of marriage. Documentation was used to complement the interview data and included relevant case information, legal regulations, and scholarly literature on marriage dispensation, character education, adolescent development, and legal literacy. Data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on three categories: the circumstances underlying marriage dispensation cases, judicial considerations, and educational values related to adolescent character and legal literacy.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of marriage dispensation cases at the Donggala Religious Court. The participants consisted of a judge and a court clerk at the Donggala Religious Court. The inclusion criterion was direct involvement in the examination or administration of marriage dispensation cases. Adolescents involved in marriage dispensation cases were not included as participants. Therefore, this study did not directly measure adolescents' character or legal literacy; instead, the educational implications were interpreted from the empirical findings and relevant educational literature.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design conducted in a natural setting without experimental manipulation or intervention. The Donggala Religious Court was selected as the case setting because the study focused on judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases and their educational implications. The empirical findings obtained from interviews and documentation were interpreted through two educational dimensions. The character education dimension included responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, mature decision-making, and awareness of consequences. The legal literacy dimension included understanding

of the minimum marriage age, marriage dispensation, rights and obligations, child protection, and the legal consequences of marriage. Accordingly, the study interprets the educational implications of judicial considerations rather than claiming a direct causal effect of court decisions on adolescents' character or legal literacy.

Result (نتائج)

The findings show that marriage dispensation remained a recurring case at the Donggala Religious Court during 2024–2026. Based on the case registration data collected in this study, 45 marriage dispensation applications were identified: 20 cases in 2024, 11 cases in 2025, and 14 cases in 2026 up to September. The data indicate that marriage dispensation continues to be sought despite the statutory minimum marriage age of 19 years. However, the 2026 data represent only a partial-year record and therefore cannot yet be used to conclude an annual increase or decrease (Pengadilan Agama Donggala, 2026).

Marriage Dispensation Cases at the Donggala Religious Court

Table 1. Distribution of Marriage Dispensation Cases by Year

Year	Number of Cases	Percentage
2024	20	44.44%
2025	11	24.44%
2026*	14	31.11%
Total	45	100%

Note: 2026 data include cases registered up to September 2026.

The annual distribution shows that the largest number of cases in the available dataset occurred in 2024, with 20 applications. The number decreased to 11 cases in 2025, while 14 cases had already been registered by September 2026. Since the 2026 period is incomplete, the data are used primarily to demonstrate the persistence of marriage dispensation cases rather than to establish a definitive longitudinal trend (Pengadilan Agama Donggala, 2026).

Circumstances Underlying Marriage Dispensation Cases

The interview findings identified two prominent circumstances associated with granted marriage dispensation applications: pregnancy before marriage and romantic relationships between prospective spouses that had become very close. Pregnancy before marriage placed the prospective spouses and their families in a situation that required an immediate response because the consequences of the relationship had already occurred (Derry Briantono, 2026). In such circumstances, judicial consideration concerned not only the age of the prospective spouses but also the situation of the prospective mother, the unborn child, family responsibility, and possible social consequences.

The second circumstance involved romantic relationships that were considered highly intimate and difficult for the families to control. Such relationships generated concerns regarding the possibility of further consequences if the relationship continued without marriage (Derry Briantono, 2026). These findings indicate that marriage dispensation applications tended to emerge when preventive mechanisms at the family and social levels had not been sufficient to prevent adolescents from entering situations with significant consequences.

Compared with previous studies that primarily examine pregnancy before marriage and close relationships as factual or legal grounds for granting marriage dispensation (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023; Karima, Rahma, Kasdi, & Nubahai, 2023), the present findings reveal an additional educational dimension. These circumstances reflect the need to strengthen adolescents' self-control, responsibility, psychological readiness, and ability to anticipate the

consequences of interpersonal decisions before they reach the stage of judicial intervention.

Educational Values Reflected in Judicial Considerations

The findings further show that judicial considerations were not limited to chronological age. Judges also considered the circumstances underlying the application, the readiness of the prospective spouses, the consequences that had already emerged, and potential risks if the application were granted or rejected (Derry Briantono, 2026). Such considerations reveal educational values related to responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, mature decision-making, and awareness of consequences.

A legal literacy dimension was also identified. The process of marriage dispensation requires adolescents and their families to encounter legal provisions regarding the minimum marriage age, court permission, child protection, and the legal consequences of marriage. These aspects demonstrate that marriage dispensation cases can be used as empirical material for identifying legal knowledge that adolescents need before they face similar circumstances.

Table 3. Educational Values Identified from the Research Findings

Empirical Finding	Character Education Dimension	Legal Literacy Dimension
Pregnancy before marriage	Responsibility; awareness of consequences	Understanding legal and social consequences of marriage
Highly intimate romantic relationship	Self-control; responsible decision-making	Awareness of legal boundaries and marriage requirements
Assessment of readiness for marriage	Psychological maturity; responsibility	Understanding the purpose of the minimum marriage age
Consideration of future consequences	Mature and prospective decision-making	Awareness of rights, obligations, and legal consequences
Marriage dispensation process	Responsibility; compliance with norms	Understanding legal procedures and marriage dispensation
Child protection considerations	Respect for personal and others' interests	Awareness of child protection and the best interests of the child

Source: Research findings, processed by the researchers, 2026.

Overall, the results show that the significance of marriage dispensation cases for adolescent character formation and legal literacy does not lie in assuming that court decisions directly shape adolescent character. Rather, the empirical circumstances and judicial considerations reveal specific preventive needs related to character formation and legal literacy. In contrast to previous studies that predominantly position marriage dispensation within the contexts of judicial reasoning and child protection (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023; Karima, Rahma, Kasdi, & Nubahai, 2023), this study identifies marriage dispensation cases as a contextual source for strengthening adolescents' responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, legal awareness, and responsible decision-making.



Discussion (مناقشة)

Marriage dispensation legally operates as a judicial mechanism for applications to marry below the statutory age (Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). The present findings, however, indicate that such cases can also be interpreted as an empirical reflection of preventive needs among adolescents. In the cases examined, circumstances such as pregnancy before marriage and highly intimate romantic relationships became important considerations in the applications for marriage dispensation. These circumstances reveal concerns related to responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, awareness of

consequences, and understanding of legal rules (Andini Puspita Sari, 2026). From the perspective of marriage and child protection law, these findings are particularly important because the regulation of the minimum marriage age is intended not only to establish legal eligibility for marriage but also to protect children from the physical, psychological, social, and educational risks associated with early marriage (Asmarini, 2021). In this respect, the findings support previous studies showing that marriage dispensation is frequently associated with premarital pregnancy and family concerns about adolescent relationships, while extending the discussion by interpreting these circumstances as indicators of gaps in adolescent character formation and legal literacy (Taqiuddin, 2019). Therefore, judicial considerations should not be viewed solely as a basis for resolving individual applications, but also as a contextual source for identifying areas in which preventive legal education and character formation need to be strengthened before adolescents and their families encounter circumstances requiring judicial intervention.

Judicial Considerations and Adolescent Character Education

The educational significance of judicial considerations can first be understood through the concept of responsibility. Marriage is not merely the formalization of an interpersonal relationship but a decision that creates long-term personal, familial, social, and legal responsibilities (Huda & Munib, 2022). When a marriage dispensation case involves circumstances that have already produced significant consequences, the judicial process inevitably confronts prospective spouses with the responsibility arising from their previous decisions (Susilowati, Endrawati, & Aprilyansyah, 2024). From an educational perspective, this indicates that responsibility should be developed before adolescents enter situations in which the consequences of their actions can no longer be easily reversed. Character education should therefore move beyond abstract moral instruction and provide adolescents with opportunities to understand the relationship between choices, consequences, and responsibility (Brendan & Nadzli Rozidu, 2021).

Self-control and mature decision-making constitute another important educational dimension (Rey-Ares, Fernández-López, Castro-González, & Rodeiro-Pazos, 2021). Adolescence is characterized by continuing development in emotional regulation and decision-making capacities, while intimate relationships may involve strong emotional and social influences (Nasir & Johari, 2024). The cases examined in this study suggest that the educational issue is not simply whether adolescents know that marriage is legally restricted before the age of 19, but whether they are able to regulate behavior and assess the long-term consequences of interpersonal decisions. Character education is therefore particularly relevant when it equips adolescents with self-control, reflective judgment, and the ability to evaluate risks before making decisions with significant consequences (Syarniah, Fidzi, Hamdan, Ma'ruf, & Rachmadi, 2025). This interpretation extends previous marriage dispensation research, which has largely concentrated on the legal grounds for granting applications and the protection of children (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023; Karima, Rahma, Kasdi, & Nubahai, 2023), by demonstrating that the same judicial circumstances can also be interpreted as indicators of preventive educational needs.

Psychological readiness further strengthens the connection between judicial considerations and character education. The legal possibility of obtaining a marriage dispensation does not necessarily mean that an adolescent has achieved the psychological, emotional, or social maturity required for married life (Supriyadi & Budi Prasetyo, 2024). The distinction between legal permission and developmental readiness is educationally important. Marriage requires the ability to manage conflict, assume responsibilities, communicate effectively, and make decisions that affect spouses and children (Beta & Marwa, 2023). Therefore, educational programs addressing adolescent relationships should not present marriage readiness solely in terms of age or legal eligibility. They should also encourage adolescents to critically assess emotional maturity, responsibility, educational continuity, and preparedness for family life. In this respect, the

findings support the broader argument that preventing early marriage requires educational preparation rather than relying solely on legal restrictions.

Marriage Dispensation as a Context for Adolescent Legal Literacy

The findings also demonstrate that legal literacy is relevant to understanding the persistence of marriage dispensation cases. Knowing that the minimum marriage age is 19 represents only the most basic level of legal knowledge. Meaningful legal literacy requires adolescents to understand why the age restriction exists, what interests it seeks to protect, how marriage dispensation operates as an exception, and what rights and obligations arise from marriage. This interpretation is consistent with Ulfah, Hidayah, and Safudin (2023), who emphasize that legal education for younger generations requires knowledge of both legal substance and legal processes (Ulfah et al., 2023). It is also consistent with Listyorini, Saputra, and Andraini (2022) and Batubara and Arifin (2020), who position legal education as an instrument for strengthening students' legal awareness (Dyah Listyorini et al., 2022; Batubara & Arifin, 2020).

However, this study extends those previous educational studies by identifying actual judicial cases as a potential contextual source for legal education. Legal literacy is often delivered through explanations of regulations, rights, obligations, or prohibited conduct (Ulfah et al., 2023). Marriage dispensation cases provide a different pedagogical opportunity because they demonstrate how legal rules operate when individuals face real-life consequences. Without exposing the identities or private circumstances of the parties, anonymized case situations can be transformed into contextual learning materials through which adolescents discuss the minimum marriage age, the purpose of legal protection, individual responsibility, child protection, and the consequences of marriage. Legal education can thereby move from merely teaching “what the law says” toward helping adolescents understand “why the law exists” and “how the law relates to their decisions.”

This interpretation also highlights the interdependence between legal literacy and character education. Legal knowledge alone cannot guarantee responsible behavior, just as character education without adequate legal knowledge may leave adolescents unable to understand the formal consequences of their choices (Aini, Hasibuan, & Gusmaneli, 2024). Adolescents may know the minimum marriage age without understanding its protective rationale, or they may understand values such as responsibility without recognizing the legal implications of marriage. Integrating the two dimensions provides a more comprehensive educational approach: legal literacy supplies knowledge of rules, rights, obligations, and consequences, while character education strengthens the internal capacities required to translate that knowledge into responsible decisions. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in positioning legal literacy and character education not as separate educational agendas but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of adolescent education.

From Corrective Judicial Intervention to Preventive Legal Education

A broader implication of the findings concerns the different positions occupied by courts and educational institutions. Judicial intervention in marriage dispensation is predominantly corrective because the court becomes involved after circumstances requiring a legal response have already emerged. Education, in contrast, can operate preventively. This distinction is particularly important because relying primarily on judicial intervention means that adolescents may encounter substantive legal knowledge only after a problem has developed. Preventive legal education should therefore introduce relevant knowledge and values before adolescents face comparable circumstances.

Based on this interpretation, the findings support a preventive educational framework consisting of four interconnected elements: legal knowledge, legal awareness, character

formation, and responsible decision-making. Legal knowledge concerns the minimum marriage age, marriage dispensation, rights and obligations, and child protection (Asmarini, 2021). Legal awareness develops an understanding of the protective purposes underlying these rules (Syamsarina, Aziz, Arzam, Hidayat, & Aji, 2022). Character formation strengthens responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, and awareness of consequences. These three elements ultimately support responsible decision-making, in which adolescents are able to evaluate the personal, educational, social, psychological, and legal consequences of their choices. This framework should be understood as a conceptual implication derived from the findings rather than as an intervention model whose effectiveness has been empirically tested in this study.

The practical implementation of this framework requires educational responsibility to extend beyond the court. Schools can integrate contextual legal literacy into character education, civic education, counseling services, or adolescent development programs. Families have an important role in discussing relationships, behavioral boundaries, responsibility, and the consequences of marriage openly rather than intervening only when problems have already emerged. Religious and community institutions can reinforce these efforts by connecting moral education with legal awareness and child protection. Courts may also contribute through educational outreach by providing anonymized information about marriage dispensation procedures and the considerations involved in such cases. Such collaboration would shift the social response from predominantly resolving the consequences of adolescent decisions toward strengthening adolescents' capacity to prevent those consequences.

The importance of these findings ultimately lies in reframing marriage dispensation as more than an endpoint of a legal problem. Judicial cases reveal educational vulnerabilities that may have developed long before an application reaches the court. Consequently, strengthening the minimum marriage age through law should be accompanied by education that enables adolescents to understand the rationale of legal protection and develop the personal capacities necessary to act upon that understanding. The study therefore suggests that effective prevention of early marriage requires a connection between legal protection and educational prevention. By integrating legal knowledge, character formation, psychological readiness, and responsible decision-making, marriage dispensation cases can provide contextual lessons for developing adolescent legal literacy that is not merely informative but preventive and formative.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study demonstrates that judicial considerations in marriage dispensation cases at the Donggala Religious Court have implications beyond legal adjudication, particularly for adolescent character education and legal literacy. Cases involving premarital pregnancy and highly intimate romantic relationships indicate the need to strengthen adolescents' responsibility, self-control, psychological readiness, decision-making skills, and awareness of the legal and social consequences of marriage. The main contribution of this study is to show that marriage dispensation cases can serve as an important basis for developing preventive legal education that integrates legal literacy with character formation. Such efforts require collaboration among schools, families, religious institutions, and communities to help adolescents make more responsible and legally informed decisions.

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