

Assessing Law Students' Learning Behaviors and Intention Through the Theory of Planned Behavior: A Case Study

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How to cite: Ochirbat, A.; Daramsenge, B. (2026). Assessing Law Students' Learning Behaviors and Intention Through the Theory of Planned Behavior: A Case Study. In: 12th International Conference on Higher Education Advances (HEAd'26). Valencia, 15-18 June 2026. <https://doi.org/10.4995/HEAd26.2026.21685>

Abstract

Legal education is an important part of higher education research. This study examined the relationships between law students' behavioral factors and learning intention in the context of an undergraduate-level course. Previous studies have focused on the relationships between students' attitudes and technology use or entrepreneurial intention, whereas research on learning behaviors among law students is lacking. We applied a theory of planned behavior (TPB) and a partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach. Our findings demonstrated no statistically significant correlations between "Attitude toward the behavior-ATB, Perceived behavioral control-PBC, Subjective norm-SN", and "Intention to learn-IL", respectively. Interestingly, students can complete a law course successfully if they are motivated by "Curious behavior-CB". However, professors should pay attention to students' negative feeling "Anxiety-ANX". In addition, the course curriculum should include more modules on "Presentation skills-PS". Our results will guide law faculties in preparing the related curriculum and in supporting the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: learning behavior; learning intention; legal education; higher education; TPB; PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

There are many prior works by researchers in the field of higher education development. Among them, the study of legal education, especially the psychological state of students' learning, can show many interesting results. Legal education focuses predominantly on analytical reasoning (Montgomery, 2007). However, if educators do not understand the processes involved in effective studying and learning, they cannot adequately encourage students to use effective

study methods (Wangerin, 1987). Emotional state and academic performance are closely linked in law students (Iijima, 1998). The positive communication between students and faculty is a key factor in the success of many law students (Cooper & Gurung, 2017). The teaching-learning process is a composition of teaching and learning capacities, a compatible and purposive relationship between student and teacher, and the clarification and implementation of educative means and goals (Redmount, 1972). Therefore, research on law students' learning behavior is integral to developing higher educational research. Accordingly, we proposed to answer two research questions: **(1)** What are the factors that significantly influence students' intention to learn successfully in a law course? **(2)** Do presentation skills mediate the relationships between behavioral factors and intention to learn in a law course?

The personal behavior comprises thoughts, feelings, and actions (Dong & Zeb, 2022). Students who already self-regulate are among the most successful in law school and improve their outcomes. However, the nature and workload of the profession they are studying can affect their well-being (Schwartz, 2003). The lawyer is a specialized profession with distinct characteristics and requires specific skills. Law students spend the most time on activities they do not enjoy or find relaxing (work and university) (Skead & Rogers, 2014). Intention has a beneficial effect on the learning process (Gleitman & Gillett, 1957). Incorporating intention-setting and law course curriculum is a way to engage students by encouraging them to work toward defining and meeting their own subjective expectations for what they want to accomplish with an assignment, rather than constantly reacting to their professor's instructions (Debush, 2023). When teachers implement deliberate, purposeful, and intentional practices and decisions in their classrooms that align with what works best in teaching and learning, they become a powerful influence on improving student achievement (Young, 2024). Law students should be taught to become self-regulated, intentional, and lifelong learners capable of handling challenging subjects effectively. This is a professional necessity (Alleva & Gundlach, 2016). (Ajzen, 1991) proposed the TPB model, which posits three conceptually independent variables (attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control), one dependent variable (intention), and the target variable (behavior). In this study, we removed the "Behavior" variable because it was not relevant to our research context. Our experiment does not focus students' continuous behavior after the course completion. The behavior refers to future use or continued behavior. Therefore, this variable is evaluated after a period of time has passed (Ajzen, 2011). TPB has been successfully used to explain and predict behavior across a range of behavioral domains (Ajzen, 2020). We will discuss the details of this theory in the following section.

2. Methodology

2.1. Developed Hypotheses (H1-H10)

Attitude Toward the Behavior-ATB (Behavioral Variable) refers to producing favorable or unfavorable behavioral beliefs (Ajzen, 2006). A law school student's behavioral attitude is an essential factor in their future career. Specifically, maintaining a positive attitude and a passion for the profession in any field of law can positively affect professional ethics when working with a wide range of people. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are generated: **H1**: ATB has a positively influences on intention to learn in a law course. **H7**: PS mediates the impact of ATB and intention to learn in a law course.

Subjective Norm-SN (Behavioral Variable) refers normative beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, our participants were undergraduate students. According to the research objectives, the influence of learning support from people they consider important (parents, teachers, friends, etc.) may positively affect future learning success. Therefore, SN can directly influence students' learning intentions and does not require mediation by "PS". Therefore, we formulated the following hypothesis: **H5**: SN has a positively influences on intention to learn in a law course.

Perceived Behavioral Control-PBC (Behavioral Variable) refers to self-efficacy or control beliefs (Ajzen, 2006). Self-confidence among law school students positively affects their ability to complete assignments and deliver presentations. In addition, self-confidence is an important factor in making appropriate decisions in any problematic situation (law debates, trials, etc.). Therefore, we formulated the following hypotheses: **H2**: PBC has a positively influences on intention to learn in a law course. **H8**: PS mediates the impact of PBC and intention to learn in a law course.

Curious behavior-CB (Behavioral Variable): We extended our research model by including the first extension variable "CB". Law students need to enter the practice not just prepared to think, write, and speak like a lawyer, but also with a healthy curiosity and a wellspring of creativity (Dykstra, 2024). If legal education is about learning in a broad sense, then we need to find a way to channel our students' curiosity (Guth, 2016). Approaching the issue with curiosity, rather than judgment, leads to easier solutions (Kelly, 2025). Accordingly, we developed the following hypotheses: **H3**: CB has a positively influences on intention to learn in a law course. **H9**: PS mediates the impact of CB and intention to learn in a law course.

Anxiety-ANX (Behavioral Variable): We extended our research model by including the second extension variable "ANX". Curiosity and anxiety are frequently viewed as opposing motivational systems, with the hypothesis that high levels of anxiety inhibit curiosity (Renner, 2006). Law students often experience anxiety during their time in law school (Dickerson, 1987). The courses that law school students take often require substantial knowledge and skills, as they

examine the norms governing the definition of legality and social norms, and how to hold individuals accountable for unlawful actions. Accordingly, we proposed the following hypotheses: **H4:** ANX has a negatively influences on intention to learn in a law course. **H10:** PS mediates the impact of ANX and intention to learn in a law course.

Presentation Skills-PS (Mediator and Skill Variable): In this study, we selected “PS” construct as a mediator variable. Lawyers spend an enormous amount of time communicating orally, both hearing and conveying information, and meeting with clients (Korn, 2004). Our class meets once a week for 4 hours and 30 minutes (3 academic hours). This four-credit course consisted of two parts: first, a lecture by the professor on specific topics in civil law; second, a seminar presentation by each student on a civil law topic prepared at home. If students are good at presenting on a chosen law topic, this can significantly mediate the relationship between their learning behavior and intention. Therefore, we extended our research model by including the third extension variable “PS”. This gives us the next hypothesis: **H6:** PS has a positively influences on intention to learn in a law course.

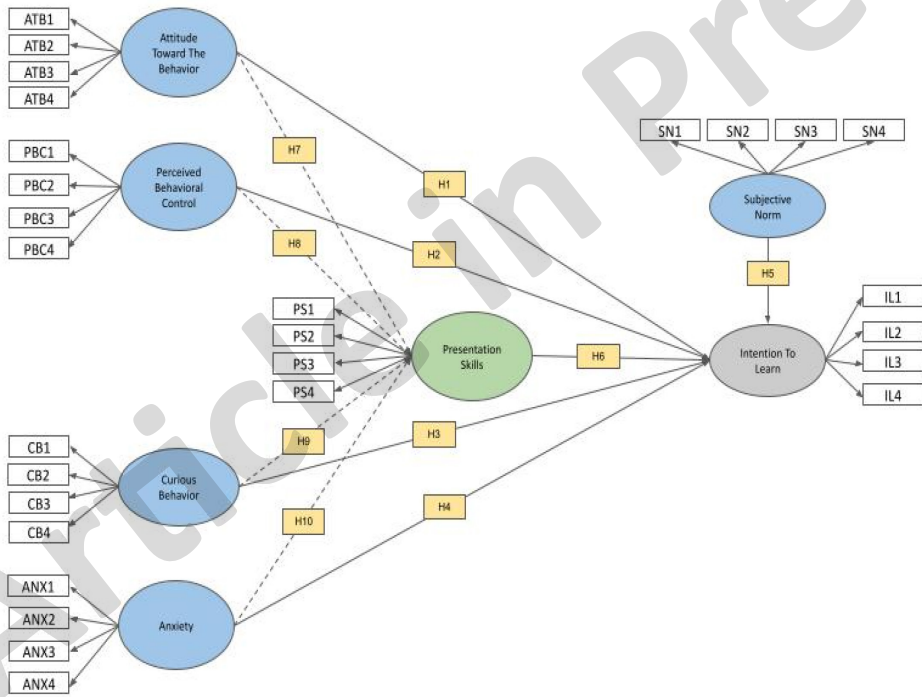


Figure 1. Extended research model. Notes: (a) H1-H10 are the proposed hypotheses; (b) “Presentation skill” is the mediator variable; (c) Dashed lines represent mediated relationships.

Intention to Learn-IL (Target Variable): In this study, we selected the intention variable as a target variable based on our research context. “Intention” is assumed to be the immediate

antecedent of behavior (Ajzen, 2006). As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely it is to be performed (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioral intention measures tend to use several standard wordings that incorporate the same level of specificity regarding action, target, context, and time frame as used in the behavior measure (Conner & Armitage, 1998).

2.2. Survey Design and Participants

Based on the statistical analysis, all variables were measured using a Five-Point Likert Scale (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree). Initially, the analysis was conducted on 60 students who responded voluntarily via self-administered questionnaires; we later removed 10 inactive students who did not provide accurate responses. Therefore, PLS-SEM analysis was conducted on data from 50 students because the measurement results were stable. Researchers should select this approach when the analysis is concerned with testing a theoretical framework (exploratory research for theory development) from a predictive perspective, and when it restricts the sample size (a minimum of 30-50) (Hair et al., 2019; Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021). All participants in this study were second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a civil law course for the fall semester of 2025 in the School of Law, International University of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. This is a required course offered by the School of Law, and all students must enroll during their second year of law study. Example questionnaires: ATB: I like it when the professor asks questions about what we're learning in the lecture. SN: My family is very supportive of my law studies. PBC: I am confident that I can finish a civil law course successfully. CB: I am interested in observing civil-related cases on social media and analyzing them critically. ANX: I feel nervous when presenting civil law theories during the seminar. PS: I can speak confidently with clear pronunciation and present civil law topics in a logical manner. IN: I plan to study more about civil law using digital resources and textbooks.

3. Results

Assessment of the Measurement Model: PLS-SEM is a causal modeling approach designed to maximize the explained variance of the dependent latent constructs (Joseph et al., 2022). Our findings demonstrated that all items' cross-loadings exceeded 0.640; Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.606 to 0.767; and composite reliabilities ranged from 0.633 to 0.946. Finally, the Average Variance Extracted value has met the requirements, which were between 0.556 and 0.650. These results showed that good internal consistency, reliability, and validity were established in our research model. In addition, discriminant validity is the second type of validity, assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT<0.90 or 0.85) and the Fornell-

Larcker criterion, respectively (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2019). Our results indicated good discriminant validity.

Assessment of the Structural Model: The structural model was assessed through examining the statistical significance of the path coefficients ($P < 0.05$, $t\text{-test} > 1.96$), and the coefficient of determination (R^2 values of 0.75-substantial, 0.50-moderate, or 0.25-weak) (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2019). The results of Table 1 are proposed to answer our first research question: What are the factors that significantly influence students' intention to learn successfully in a law course? Accordingly, no statistically significant correlations between ATB and IL ($t=1.406$, $P=0.080$), PBC and IL ($t=0.505$, $P=0.307$), SN and IL ($t=1.300$, $P=0.097$), PS and IL ($t=0.210$, $P=0.417$). Therefore, H1, H2, H5, and H6 are not supported. In contrast, IL is significantly affected by CB ($t=2.988$, $P=0.001^{**}$), supporting H3. Furthermore, H4 is confirmed ($t=1.510$, $P=0.066$), indicating that ANX is a negative factor on the learning intention in a law course. Moreover, R^2 value indicated 0.516 (moderate).

Table 1. Path Coefficients of The Direct Effects

	Relationships	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	t-statistics (>1.96)	P values (<0.05)
H1	ATB -> IL	0.256	0.228	0.182	1.406	0.080
H2	PBC -> IL	-0.063	-0.046	0.125	0.505	0.307
H3	CB -> IL	0.380	0.395	0.127	2.988	0.001**
H4	ANX -> IL	-0.262	-0.239	0.173	1.510	0.066
H5	SN -> IL	0.190	0.204	0.147	1.300	0.097
H6	PS -> IL	0.031	0.046	0.147	0.210	0.417

Notes: (a) Bold values indicate supported relationships (** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$); (b) H-Hypothesis

Mediating Effect (Indirect Effects): Mediation occurs when a third variable, referred to as a mediator variable, intervenes between two other related constructs (Joseph et al., 2022). In this section, we proposed to address our second research question: Do presentation skills mediate the relationships between behavioral factors and behavioral intention to learn in a law course? Accordingly, "PS" did not have significant mediator effects on four indirect relationships, including ATB and IL ($t=0.161$, $P=0.436$), PBC and IL ($t=0.187$, $P=0.426$), CB and IL ($t=0.174$, $P=0.431$), ANX and IL ($t=0.021$, $P=0.492$). Based on these findings, H7, H8, H9, and H10 are not supported.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The research purpose of this study is to investigate relationships between law students' behavioral factors and learning intention through a TPB. Our findings and their implications

can be divided into two parts based on the results. **(1) Theoretical Implications:** To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to use an extended TPB model (additional factors including “CB”, “ANX”, and “PS”) to investigate students' learning intention in a law course. Therefore, our findings contribute to the existing literature on the application of the TPB model and research on learning behavior and legal education. In addition, we recommend that future studies try to extend this theory as much as possible based on the participants' backgrounds. This could lead to more interesting results in this type of research. **(2) Practical Implications:** All our results will provide a valuable reference for law school faculty and university policymakers in preparing the related curriculum. The results demonstrated no statistically significant correlations between the key factors of the theory, including “ATB and IL”, “PBC and IL”, “SN and IL”. Therefore, these factors did not strongly influence law students' motivation to continue studying a law course. In other words, these results remind us that most students are not fully confident in themselves and do not feel the importance of receiving support from people who are important to them. Therefore, we suggest that instructors should consider these findings. We are surprised that the direct effect of “PS and IL”, and the specific indirect-mediator effects of “ATB → PS → IL” and “PBC → PS → IL” are rejected. This implies that students do not feel the significance of “PS”. These findings suggest that instructors should remind the importance of legal profession skills and include more communication-focused components in the course curriculum. Interestingly, the direct path “CB and IL” is supported, but “CB → PS → IL” is not supported, which implies that if law students are motivated by “CB” even without the mediation of “PS” in a law course, their intention will be significantly affected. Given these results, “CB” is necessary for law students due to its professional relevance, and instructors should encourage its use throughout the course. Therefore, we suggest that embedding “CB” in the course's core curriculum is essential for students' future academic success. Furthermore, “ANX and IL” is confirmed, and “ANX → PS → IL” is not supported, which implies that even with the mediation of PS in a law course, “ANX” is a negative factor of students' intention. Although this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions, certain limitations should be noted for future research. **First**, the participants were students enrolled in a law course at a single university. Therefore, we recommend that future research include a broader range of participants, such as multiple universities offering the same courses. **Second**, we initially included 7 variables with 28 indicators in our research model; however, we later excluded 8 indicators based on low cross-loadings identified in the PLS-SEM analysis. Therefore, we suggest that future studies include more items, depending on the research purpose. **Third**, we could not examine the behavior variable, one of the core constructs in the TPB, because it was not relevant to our research context. This may yield additional valuable insights in this area of future research.

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