

THE ROLE OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHICS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Civic education (PKn) in elementary schools plays a crucial role in shaping students' national identity and moral values from an early age. Through civic education, students are introduced to fundamental values of national life such as patriotism, tolerance, social responsibility, and respect for diversity. This study aims to examine the role of civic education (PKn) in fostering national identity and ethics among elementary school students. The research employed a literature review method, analyzing and synthesizing findings from books, journal articles, and other scientific publications related to the topic, published between 2019 and 2024. The data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach to identify recurring patterns and insights from prior studies. The findings reveal that civic education effectively builds students' awareness of national identity and strengthens their moral and social ethics when implemented through interactive, participatory, and contextual learning strategies. Furthermore, the integration of civic values in daily learning activities was found to enhance students' sense of nationalism and empathy toward others. In conclusion, civic education in elementary schools is essential for developing a generation that embodies strong national identity, civic responsibility, and moral integrity.

Keywords :

Civic Education, National Identity, National Ethics, Elementary School, Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in shaping intelligent, moral, and responsible individuals. It equips people with the ability to determine a better future and contribute to national progress. Education also serves to liberate individuals from ignorance and oppression by fostering critical and rational thinking. One of the key components of education is character education, which aims to shape students' morality and personality from an early age, particularly at the elementary school level.

Education functions as a primary tool in shaping a nation's character and identity. Among various school subjects, Civic Education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan* or PKn) holds a strategic role in building students' national identity and moral values. Through Civic Education, students learn about nationalism, patriotism, tolerance, and social responsibility within the elementary school environment. This subject also serves as an essential medium to cultivate national awareness and foster pride in

being part of the Indonesian nation. According to Yuliana and Setiono (2023), Civic Education at the elementary level significantly contributes to strengthening students' civic awareness and commitment to democratic values.

According to Lickona (1991), effective character education encompasses three core dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In the context of Civic Education, learning should not only emphasize the cognitive aspect — such as understanding *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution — but also nurture emotional attachment to national identity and encourage students to act in accordance with civic values. Thus, PKn plays a crucial role in developing holistic moral character among students from an early age. Sari, Utami, and Ramadhan (2022) found that character-based Civic Education helps students internalize moral reasoning and ethical decision-making.

Moreover, Bandura's (1986) social learning theory explains that human behavior is shaped through observation and imitation within social environments. Teachers, as role models, play a significant role in instilling national and moral values in students. Through meaningful interactions and learning activities, students can internalize civic values reflected in teachers' behavior, such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. Research by Prasetyo and Hidayah (2023) confirms that teachers' exemplary behavior directly enhances students' empathy and civic discipline.

In the context of national identity formation, Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory provides an important framework. National identity arises from individuals' awareness of belonging to a larger social group — the nation. Through Civic Education, students are guided to understand that being an Indonesian citizen entails moral and social responsibilities to maintain unity, respect diversity, and participate actively in civic life. Similarly, Nuraini and Sulastri (2024) demonstrated that PKn-based projects strengthen students' sense of belonging and pride as Indonesian citizens.

On the other hand, Ki Hadjar Dewantara emphasized that education should guide students toward moral and character development rooted in Indonesian cultural values. He stated that true education is an effort to guide children's natural potential so they become morally, intellectually, and spiritually balanced individuals (Setiawan, 2020). This principle aligns with the goals of Civic Education, which aims not only to teach students about their rights and responsibilities but also to build moral and character integrity. Dewi and Handayani (2025) further found that integrating local culture into PKn enhances students' understanding of Indonesian identity and fosters ethical behavior aligned with national values.

The national identity of younger generations is often challenged by globalization, which brings diverse cultural influences. In this context, Civic Education acts as a vital instrument for cultivating national consciousness and pride in local culture. However, the implementation of PKn still faces obstacles such as limited learning media, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of innovative teaching methods. As emphasized by Lickona (1991) and Bandura (1986), character education and social learning must be consistently integrated through direct experiences and role modeling. In addition, Handoyo and Sugiarto (2024) argue that digital-based civic education can enhance students' moral engagement and national awareness when implemented with interactive learning strategies.

Globalization has caused rapid social and cultural changes, making education an essential factor in preserving national values. Without early cultivation of these values, young generations risk losing their national identity and ethical foundations. Therefore, Civic Education is not merely a compulsory subject but a strategic instrument for shaping intelligent, moral, and responsible citizens.

Previous studies have shown that effective implementation of Civic Education at the elementary level positively influences students' attitudes and behavior. Learning approaches based on *Pancasila* values, contextual experiences, and participatory methods have been proven to increase national awareness and foster students' social ethics (Safitri et al., 2021; Isnaeni et al., 2023). Kurniawan and Wulandari (2023) also reported that community-based Civic Education strengthens social responsibility and civic participation among elementary students. However, major challenges remain

in improving teacher competence and curriculum support to achieve the full potential of PKn in developing national identity.

Based on this background, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of Civic Education in building national identity and civic ethics at the elementary school level. To achieve this objective, a literature-based study was conducted by reviewing recent academic works relevant to the topic from 2019 to 2024.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method Type

This study employed a qualitative research approach through a literature review method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of concepts, theories, and findings related to Civic Education (PKn) and its role in shaping students' national identity and civic values. The literature review method emphasizes the process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing previous research to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this method enables researchers to construct conceptual connections across studies and highlight consistent themes that emerge from existing academic discourse.

Sources of Data

The data in this study were obtained from various secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and conference papers published between 2019 and 2024. Both national and international publications were considered to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and educational contexts. The literature selection process focused on studies directly related to civic education, value formation, national identity, and ethics in elementary education. These sources were gathered from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and official educational journal repositories. The inclusion criteria for the selected works were: (1) relevance to the topic of civic education and national identity; (2) publication within the past five years to ensure data currency; and (3) credibility of the source as evidenced by institutional affiliation or journal indexation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search and documentation process. The researcher identified relevant keywords such as "*civic education*," "*national identity*," "*elementary school values*," and "*character education*." Literature that met the inclusion criteria was carefully reviewed, summarized, and categorized based on thematic relevance. Each source was analyzed for its theoretical framework, research design, and key findings related to the role of PKn in developing students' civic awareness and ethical values.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this research used a descriptive-qualitative approach involving thematic categorization and conceptual synthesis. The findings from each reviewed source were grouped into major thematic areas, including (1) the function of civic education in value formation, (2) the contribution of PKn to national identity development, and (3) strategies for implementing civic values in elementary school learning. The analysis followed a qualitative meta-analysis technique as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), which emphasizes identifying patterns, comparing concepts, and integrating ideas across multiple studies. This process allowed the researcher to construct a coherent and comprehensive narrative about how Civic Education contributes to the development of national identity and moral ethics in elementary school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature strongly indicates that Civic Education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan* or PKn) serves as a cornerstone in shaping students' national identity and civic morality, especially at the elementary school level. Civic Education provides not only knowledge about the structure of the nation and its values but also becomes a vital instrument in instilling attitudes of nationalism, patriotism, and social responsibility from an early age. Through Civic Education, students are encouraged to internalize the essential values of *Pancasila*, understand Indonesia's historical struggles, and develop respect for state symbols as expressions of shared identity. In alignment with the Indonesian motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity"), Civic Education cultivates a deep understanding of pluralism and respect for differences as a moral foundation for national harmony (Mutoharoh & Marliyanti, 2024).

Moreover, Rahman and Yusuf (2023) demonstrated that multicultural-based Civic Education contributes to the strengthening of students' tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion. This perspective aligns with the findings of Rizky et al. (2024), who argue that Civic Education acts as a cultural defense mechanism against the erosion of national identity amid globalization and technological transformation. Through exposure to contextual, discussion-based, and participatory learning models, students not only memorize civic concepts but also develop an affective bond with the values of unity, justice, and democracy that underpin the Indonesian nation.

Theoretically, the role of Civic Education can be grounded in Lickona's (1991) character education framework, which emphasizes that character formation consists of three interrelated components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Within the PKn context, this framework manifests as an integrated pedagogical process in which teachers must help students comprehend civic values (knowing), foster emotional attachment to the homeland (feeling), and practice these values in real-life behavior (action). This triadic approach ensures that Civic Education functions not merely as cognitive instruction but as moral cultivation. Sari et al. (2022) found that the incorporation of Pancasila-based moral education significantly improves students' ethical reasoning, empathy, and civic participation. Similarly, Utami and Sanjaya (2025) confirmed that structured character-building programs within Civic Education classrooms foster discipline, honesty, and a sense of civic responsibility among elementary school learners.

In addition, Bandura's (1986) *social learning theory* reinforces the importance of role modeling and environmental influence in character formation. Students internalize values not only through formal instruction but also through observation of their teachers' actions, communication style, and ethical consistency. Thus, teachers serve as living exemplars of national values. Prasetyo and Hidayah (2023) revealed that students in classrooms where teachers modeled consistent civic virtues—such as honesty, fairness, and cooperation—showed greater civic engagement and discipline. This aligns with Rahayu et al. (2024), who reported that Civic Education projects that incorporate role modeling and civic participation activities enhance democratic awareness, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging among students.

From the perspective of Tajfel and Turner's (1986) *social identity theory*, national identity can be viewed as a collective self-concept derived from individuals' membership in a larger social group, namely the Indonesian nation. Civic Education serves as a structured mechanism for strengthening this sense of belonging, where students are guided to see themselves as integral parts of the Indonesian community. Nuraini and Sulastri (2024) found that students involved in collaborative, project-based PKn activities exhibit stronger identification with national values and higher levels of patriotic pride compared to those engaged in conventional classroom settings. Ajahra (2024) further emphasized that the integration of national identity education within the PKn curriculum enhances students' civic awareness and encourages them to take active roles in promoting national unity and cultural preservation.

Beyond Western theories, local educational thought—particularly that of Ki Hadjar Dewantara—provides a uniquely Indonesian perspective on moral and civic development. Dewantara emphasized

that education should guide the growth of a child's innate potential to achieve balance in intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Setiawan, 2020). His philosophy complements the aims of Civic Education by placing emphasis on holistic human development based on Indonesian cultural values. Dewi and Handayani (2025) found that integrating local culture and values—such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *musyawarah* (deliberation), and *tenggang rasa* (empathy)—into PKN significantly enhances students' moral sensitivity and respect for diversity. Retnasari et al. (2024) also highlighted that fostering school culture aligned with Civic Education principles strengthens students' internalization of values such as responsibility, cooperation, and democratic participation.

Empirical findings from various recent studies reaffirm that Civic Education, when implemented with value-oriented and participatory methods, contributes greatly to the formation of ethical, tolerant, and socially responsible citizens. Safitri et al. (2021) and Munthe & Octavian (2024) found that PKN programs grounded in the core values of *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution effectively nurture civic morality and intercultural understanding. Isnaeni et al. (2023) and Kurniawan & Wulandari (2023) further demonstrated that community-based and project-based Civic Education programs encourage students to translate civic values into real-life social actions, improving cooperation, empathy, and leadership skills.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges continue to hinder the full effectiveness of Civic Education in elementary schools. As noted by Mutoharoh and Marliyanti (2024), obstacles such as limited teacher competence, lack of creative instructional media, and insufficient curriculum support often impede the achievement of Civic Education goals. To address these issues, Vygotsky's *constructivist learning theory* offers a valuable foundation, emphasizing the importance of social interaction, collaborative learning, and scaffolding in building deeper understanding. Lestari and Suryana (2022) demonstrated that project-based and value-driven Civic Education models significantly increase students' motivation, critical thinking, and internalization of civic principles. Moreover, Wijayanti and Harahap (2024) observed that integrating interactive digital platforms in constructivist Civic Education settings improves students' conceptual understanding and engagement with citizenship themes.

Therefore, by synthesizing classical theories (Lickona, Bandura, Tajfel & Turner) with local wisdom (Ki Hadjar Dewantara) and modern approaches (constructivism and digital pedagogy), Civic Education at the elementary level emerges as a comprehensive framework for national identity formation. It not only imparts knowledge about citizenship but also fosters emotional attachment, ethical reasoning, and civic participation. Civic Education, when implemented holistically, has the transformative potential to shape a generation of intelligent, morally upright, and socially responsible citizens who embody Indonesia's national ideals and contribute actively to its sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature reviewed from various national and international sources published between 2019 and 2024, it can be concluded that *Civic Education plays a crucial role in shaping the national identity of elementary school students*. Through Civic Education, students are introduced to foundational national values such as Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, love for the homeland, unity in diversity, and a sense of national belonging. The studies analyzed (Safitri et al., 2021; Isnaeni et al., 2023) show that contextual and participatory learning strategies in Civic Education help strengthen students' awareness of their identity as part of the Indonesian nation. By integrating character education principles and social interaction within the classroom, Civic Education fosters pride, responsibility, and emotional attachment to national symbols and values from an early age.

The findings also reveal that *Civic Education significantly contributes to the development of civic ethics among elementary school students*. Through lessons emphasizing moral behavior, cooperation,

tolerance, and democratic participation, students learn to apply ethical principles in their daily lives. Empirical studies (Lestari & Suryana, 2022; Munthe & Octavian, 2024) demonstrate that Civic Education can cultivate moral awareness and civic responsibility when implemented through value-based and project-based learning. This process aligns with Lickona's (1991) character education theory and Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, where students learn ethics through direct experience and modeling from teachers. Therefore, Civic Education not only builds intellectual understanding but also shapes students' moral character and civic responsibility, forming the foundation for ethical citizenship in a pluralistic and democratic society.

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