

Dynamics of Citizenship Literacy Perception Among Indonesian Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of high school students towards civic literacy in Indonesia, encompassing four key domains: civic institutions and systems, civic principles, civic participation, and civic roles and identities. Employing phenomenological qualitative methods and thematic content analysis, the research examines how students' social interactions, personal histories, and social values shape their understanding of citizenship literacy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The results indicate that students possess a varied understanding of the system of government, democratic values, social and political participation, and civic identity and roles, highlighting the significant influence of civic education on their citizenship literacy. This study recommends the integration of practical experiences and real-world applications into educational programs to strengthen students' citizenship literacy.

KEYWORDS *citizenship literacy, student perception, citizenship education, Indonesia, high school education*



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Indonesia has faced the challenge of moral degradation among the younger generation (Musa, 2023; Nurjianti W., Sri; Mirna; Asrina, 2019; Wijaya et al., 2024). This phenomenon reflects shifting social and ethical values, influenced by various factors including globalization, the impact of social media, and changing socioeconomic dynamics. Over time, the geographical and cultural differences that once separated people in different parts of the world have begun to fade. The world appears increasingly borderless with the rapid development of *communication technology* and ongoing transformation, leading to blurred boundaries between countries (Dewi, 2019). According to Kramer (Hidayah et al., 2023), the advancement of the era and technology has ushered in a new age—the data-driven era or *era 4.0*—where vast amounts of information can be accessed digitally without proper filtering. Technological advances facilitate the dissemination of digital information, which can be inaccurate; if citizens lack integrity or a strong identity, this may result in societal disorder (Armawi, 2020). Information technology also serves as a vehicle for the spread of *westernization*, a pattern of Western cultural influence that is rapidly adopted by many young people

(Ikhtiarti et al., 2019). There is concern that the impact of globalization, which alters societal character in ways that may not align with *Pancasila* values, could cause the nation to lose sight of its foundational principles. This underscores the importance of cultivating *good citizens*—individuals who embody the identity of the Indonesian nation (Fitriani & Dewi, 2021). In this context, the importance of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise, and, especially, civic literacy is paramount for strengthening character and morals among the younger generation.

According to the *KBBI* (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), literacy is divided into three components: the ability to read and write, knowledge or skills in specific fields or activities, and the capacity to process information and knowledge for life skills. The World Economic Forum (2015) identifies six basic literacies essential for 21st-century life skills: literacy, numeracy literacy, science literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, and cultural and civic literacy (Nudiati, 2020).

Civic literacy encompasses civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance the quality of national life and foster an understanding of societal, national, and state life (Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023). Miller J.D. (Hamid et al., 2018) defines civic literacy as a deep understanding of scientific terminology and the ability to engage with public discourse and provide arguments on controversial topics. Citizenship literacy is the knowledge and capacity of citizens to comprehend their political environment (Saputri et al., 2019). Civic literacy is essential for every young citizen as preparation for active citizenship in the 21st century (Suyanto et al., 2018). According to Fudge & Skipworth (Çakmak & Taşkiran, 2020), civic literacy forms the foundation for democratic stability and its reinforcement within society. Citizenship literacy, which includes understanding the rights and obligations of citizens, knowledge of government structures and functions, and awareness of social and political issues, is crucial for developing citizenship skills. This literacy enables individuals to make informed decisions, participate actively in social and political life, and contribute positively to society.

The International Civic and Citizenship Study (*ICCS*) divides civic knowledge into four domains relevant to civic education: *civic institutions and systems*, *civic principles*, *civic participation*, and *civic roles and identities* (Schulz et al., 2023). Each domain is further subdivided into subdomains, capturing various interrelated aspects of citizenship literacy.

Despite the importance of these domains, an in-depth understanding of how high school students perceive and internalize citizenship literacy concepts remains limited. Several studies have developed learning methods aimed at improving students' understanding of citizenship (Amelia & Santoso, 2022; Hasrah, 2019; June, 2020; Kuntari, 2022; Mulyadi & Anyan, 2019; Zulfia Latifah et al., 2020). These methods are designed to make citizenship concepts more accessible and relevant to high school students, with the goal of strengthening their understanding and encouraging active participation in national life.

This study aims to explore the dynamics of civic literacy perceptions among Indonesian senior high school students, focusing on the four key domains: *civic institutions and systems*, *civic principles*, *civic participation*, and *civic roles and identities*. By employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research seeks to understand how students' social interactions, personal histories, and social

values shape their citizenship literacy. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of civic education in fostering these perceptions, with the broader goal of identifying strategies to enhance civic literacy among young Indonesians. Ultimately, this research contributes to the development of more effective civic education frameworks that align with the needs of students in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative exploration of civic literacy perceptions, moving beyond traditional quantitative assessments to capture the nuanced and contextual understandings of students. Unlike previous studies that often focus on theoretical knowledge, this study delves into students' lived experiences, examining how they interpret and apply civic concepts in real-life contexts. Additionally, the research adopts the *ICCS* framework, providing a structured yet flexible approach to analyzing civic literacy across diverse domains. By integrating participatory observations and in-depth interviews, the study offers fresh insights into the interplay between civic education and students' evolving perceptions of citizenship.

Despite the growing emphasis on civic education in Indonesia, there remains a significant gap in understanding how high school students perceive and internalize civic literacy concepts. Existing studies often prioritize policy-level analyses or standardized assessments, overlooking the subjective experiences and contextual factors that shape students' civic understanding. Furthermore, limited research has explored the four domains of civic literacy holistically, particularly in the Indonesian context, where socio-cultural diversity and globalization present unique challenges. This study addresses these gaps by providing a detailed, student-centered examination of civic literacy, bridging the divide between theoretical frameworks and practical realities in civic education.

The findings of this study have important implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. By highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of current civic education practices, the research can inform the design of more engaging and relevant learning materials that emphasize practical application and critical thinking. The study also underscores the need for experiential learning opportunities, such as policy simulations and community projects, to deepen students' civic engagement. On a broader scale, the research advocates for a more inclusive approach to civic education that considers Indonesia's diverse cultural and social contexts, ultimately fostering a generation of informed, active, and responsible citizens. These insights are particularly timely in an era marked by digital transformation and global interconnectedness, where civic literacy is essential for navigating complex socio-political landscapes.

For these reasons, this qualitative research, entitled "The Dynamics of Perception of Civic Literacy among Indonesian High School Students," is designed to delve deeper into how high school students view civic literacy, especially in the four domains of civic literacy: *civic institutions and systems*, *civic principles*, *civic participation*, and *civic roles and identities*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a phenomenological research design and thematic content analysis as the primary method. The study aims to describe and understand high school students' perceptions and experiences of citizenship literacy, with a focus on how their social values, personal histories, and social interactions shape their understanding of citizenship. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies to explore the meanings constructed by students within the context of citizenship in their schools.

Participants in this research consist of high school students selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, to ensure a diversity of perspectives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of student participation in civic activities at school, and documentation studies of civic education materials used in the school setting.

The data collection process in this study comprises three main stages: the planning stage, the implementation stage, and the data analysis stage. The planning stage involves securing the necessary permits and administrative requirements for conducting the research, including coordination with school teachers to facilitate the preparation of students willing to participate in interviews via the *Zoom Meeting* application.

Next, the implementation stage involves the development of research instruments, including observation and interview guides. Interviews are conducted directly via *Zoom Meeting*, allowing researchers to interact with students and obtain information in real time. During this stage, researchers record all interactions and responses obtained during the interview sessions.

The data analysis stage begins after all data have been collected. Interview data are analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques. This process includes creating digital field notes, compiling information from *Zoom Meeting* recordings, organizing the information in a structured format, and drawing conclusions based on the analyzed data. This workflow facilitates a deep understanding of how high school students perceive and comprehend civic literacy through a qualitative approach.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Understanding of the system of government

Based on the responses from interviews with students regarding their understanding of institutions and the civic system in Indonesia, it can be seen that there is a fairly mature understanding of the structure and function of government institutions. One of the students accurately described the presidential system in Indonesia, noting the role of the President and how executive power is distributed, which reflects a strong understanding of the framework of government "As far as I know, if in Indonesia, the President's Republic will have subordinates such as the Governor including the House of Representatives and the regional representative council of the orphanage, giving a statement of direct numbers that the President regulates everything But through his language So there is a central government and local governments that process the president's government." Other students' responses highlighted the decentralized system, emphasizing the role of strategic planning and execution between the central and regional governments "So the authority of the Regional Government for planning planning will be sent to the central government. If

the central government is for control and also for security that is important for the local government or the community."

Further discussion of the role of institutions, such as the DPR and KPK, illustrates students' understanding of specific functions in the system of government. One response about the House of Representatives noted its role in articulating the needs and public policies of "the House of Representatives to voice the policies or voices of the people or those that come from the people for the people." The role of the KPK is also mentioned in the context of anti-corruption efforts, although students note that its effectiveness could be better "The function of the KPK for the eradication of corruption. Although it is still not effective because there are still many corruption cases in Indonesia."

These responses demonstrate a fundamental but diverse understanding of how civic institutions function in Indonesia's democratic system, which suggests that students are aware of the multilayered responsibilities and mechanisms of state governance. It provides a solid basis for them to appreciate how the citizenship system works and their role in the system.

2. Understanding of the basic values of citizenship

The students' responses demonstrate a broad understanding of democracy as a system that involves the active participation of the community in decision-making. One of the students explained that democracy "is not based on one person but also concerns people's decisions," which shows the understanding of democracy as a collective process. The example given by one of the respondents such as participation in elections affirms that democracy involves decision-making rooted in the voice of the people, according to the response of another student who said, "Democracy is when we can get an answer from the voices of the people."

Another student added an important dimension by stating, "Democracy in my opinion is mutual respect for each other's opinions," emphasizing the importance of tolerance and dialogue in democracy. The student also extends this into the social context by adding that problems must be solved "by kinship," which shows an understanding that democracy also involves aspects of togetherness and cooperation in solving problems.

In the context of human rights, students demonstrate a high awareness of the fundamental rights necessary to support a dignified life and participation in a democratic society. Responses such as "If I think human rights are important because we as citizens have something we are entitled to receive," highlight the view that human rights are reciprocal for an individual's contribution to the state, such as paying taxes.

Students also mention specific rights such as "the right to education, the right to have a place of residence, the right to have the right to vote," which are the basis of effective political and social participation. One student in particular emphasized the importance of freedom of opinion in the context of the development of the nation, saying that "The right to opinion is important because the more a nation develops, the more diverse the opinions that each society has," which describes democracy as an inclusive forum for diverse views and constructive discussions.

The responses from the students describe a deep and reflective understanding of the principles of democracy and human rights. They not only identify key aspects of both domains but also express the values that underpin democratic life, such as tolerance, togetherness, and active participation. Although their understanding may still be evolving, it is clear that civic education has given them the understanding to understand and appreciate the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic country. Further education that focuses on the practical application of these principles can further strengthen their capacity as active participants in the democratic process.

3. Understanding of the form of participation in citizenship

Students demonstrate a diverse understanding of how to participate in politics as citizens. Some respondents gave an example of a general election "For example, participating in an election," which reflected their form of political participation. Other responses of students also conveyed their involvement in various initiatives that support political and social activities in the school environment. One of the students described his participation in an organization that aims to promote a positive image of the school through campaigns such as awareness of the dangers of drugs: "I happened to join an organization called the sons and daughters of the school. To brand the name of the school is like for example the danger of drugs." This suggests that political participation can also include activities that promote the health and safety of students.

Students also mentioned being active in school democracy activities, such as "Participating in the election of student council president," which is a hands-on democratic practice among students, and "making posters about elections," which show their efforts to educate and influence their peers about the importance of elections.

Furthermore, students responded to political participation by participating in debates that not only improved their ability to argue and speak in public, but also resulted in recognition in the form of scholarships from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) "I happened to not participate in the student council but I participated in the debate until finally I was selected to participate in the scholarship by the Ministry of Education and Culture". This suggests that active involvement in activities such as debate can open up wider educational opportunities.

In the context of social participation, students provide real examples of how they are involved in a community in society. One student mentioned, "Community service, recitation," as an example of activities that strengthen social ties and togetherness. Another response described participation in a volunteer program that supports children in orphanages, "I joined the volunteer program teaching the children in the orphanage so those who don't have access to that education, I join." Initiatives like this show students' awareness of the needs around them and the desire to contribute positively, strengthening social support networks for those in need.

In addition, participation in STEM-based activities in the local environment was also raised, as one respondent said, "In Bali we created a community organization with an agenda to clean up the river. So in Bali, the culture of clean environment is very active, for us STEM children can make their own tools that can be used by the community for these activities." The initiative shows that students are not only involved in social activities but also integrate their academic knowledge to provide innovative solutions to the surrounding environmental problems.

Another student revealed his more selective approach to social participation, admitting that he tends to get involved in big events like weddings, rather than routine activities, "Actually I'm not individualistic. It's just that sometimes it's embarrassing or something, but I'm still trying to figure out who it is, but if it's for the frequency of the gathering, it's not just a matter of time. Yes, it's rarely more if there is an event like that if the one that is frequent is rare. "It's only when there's a 'wedding' party." This suggests that while some students may not be involved often, they find ways to participate in the moments they consider important.

The students' responses regarding civic participation suggest that a strong understanding of the different ways in which they can contribute in both political and social contexts. From participating in elections to engaging in community activities, students understand the importance of being active and involved in society. They don't just see

participation as an obligation, but as an opportunity to influence and strengthen social networks.

4. Understanding of awareness of the role of a citizen

Students convey a variety of views on what they consider to be their responsibilities as citizens. Some emphasize the importance of learning and acquiring knowledge as part of their responsibilities, with the intention of contributing more effectively to society. For example, a student stated, "I am still a student now, so it is my responsibility to study. Obey traffic regulations, maintain safety, study diligently."

Others see this responsibility in a broader context, including efforts to improve bigger problems in society, as expressed by another student, "Because I am a student I think my responsibility is that when I grow up I can contribute to the country for example through my studies I start to find something that helps Indonesia."

The same was also stated by other students who also want to advance the country of Indonesia, "Maybe my responsibility now is to seek knowledge with the scholarship I got and I have to return to Indonesia where I have to make Indonesia as my research mecca."

The response to national identity shows great pride in Indonesia's heritage and culture. Students express a sense of pride in being part of Indonesia, which they see as a country rich in culture and tolerance. One student stated, "Proud to be a citizen because if we explore a lot of Indonesian culture and nature, Indonesia is also good. The tolerance is also good."

However, some students are also aware of the challenges faced by the country and talk about the active role in addressing these issues. One respondent stated, "I'm proud of it, because Indonesia is very rich, especially when it comes to its culture. The people are also very friendly and it feels comfortable in Indonesia because we see that in other countries there are still many conflicts in their own countries. The tolerance is now very good because yes, we knew in the past that there might be intercultural tensions, but now we see that we have started to tolerate it."

Student responses demonstrate a complex understanding of civic roles and identities. They recognize the responsibility of individuals to learn and contribute to society, as well as express pride in their national identity rooted in its cultural richness and social tolerance. This awareness encourages them to not only appreciate their culture but also to be active in overcoming the challenges faced by the state.

CONCLUSION

Civic literacy encompasses the ability to understand, analyze, and participate effectively in the social, political, and economic contexts of society, as reflected in students' responses across four key domains: *citizenship institutions and systems*, *citizenship principles*, *civic participation*, and *civic roles and identities*. Students demonstrate a foundational grasp of government institutions and democratic values, actively engage in social and political activities, and express strong national pride and responsibility. However, there remains a need to deepen their practical understanding of how these systems and principles operate in daily life and are protected by law. To enhance civic literacy, it is recommended that education place greater emphasis on experiential learning—such as policy simulations, debates, and community service projects—to bridge theory and practice and foster a more profound sense of civic responsibility. For future research, developing a comprehensive citizenship literacy instrument that assesses not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills and active participation would offer valuable

insights into the effectiveness of civic education and inform improvements in teaching strategies.

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