

The Role of Civic Education in Counteracting Hoaxes and Political Polarization in Adolescents: A Literature Review

Lina Marlina

Program Studi Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Bidang PPKn, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia
Email: dosen02921@unpam.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of Civic Education in counteracting hoaxes and political polarization among adolescents. In the digital era that is loaded with information that is not necessarily valid, adolescents are vulnerable to the spread of hoaxes and increasing political polarization. The method used in this study is qualitative content analysis with a thematic technique approach to selected literature, especially the book Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn by Richard G. Niemi & Jane Junn (1998), as well as various literature related to digital literacy, critical thinking, and democracy education in the context of Civic Education. The results of the study show that Civic Education plays a role in increasing adolescents' critical awareness of the information they consume, strengthening their understanding of democratic values, and encouraging tolerance in the face of political differences. Digital literacy-based learning has been proven to be effective in helping adolescents sort out valid information and develop wiser attitudes towards political dynamics. And it can be concluded that strengthening digital literacy in the Civic Education curriculum must be a priority so that adolescents can face the challenges of the digital era more preparedly. This study opens up opportunities for further research related to the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches that can be applied in increasing adolescents' critical power towards digital information.

Keywords: Civic Education, Hoaxes, Political Polarization, Youth



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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the development of information technology has a significant impact on information consumption patterns among teenagers. Easy access to various sources of information through the internet is not always accompanied by an adequate increase in digital literacy. As a result, many adolescents are exposed to hoaxes and experience political polarization due to widespread disinformation on social media (Guess et al., 2020). Various digital media used by teenagers, such as social media and online forums, are the main channels for the dissemination of information, both valid and hoaxes. Unfortunately, low digital literacy skills cause many adolescents to struggle in sorting out accurate information, which can ultimately reinforce adolescent cognitive biases. Ideal citizenship education should be able to instill a deep understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as teach critical thinking skills to evaluate information objectively. With discussion-based learning efforts, problem-solving, and active student involvement, it is more effective than conventional lecture methods in forming a deeper understanding of citizenship. A more participatory method, students not only understand the concepts of citizenship, but can also apply them in their daily lives, including in assessing the information they consume in digital media.

Research (Hoskins & Janmaat (2019), shows that interactive methods in PKN can improve students' critical thinking skills in dealing with social and political issues. It was found that students who engaged in problem-solving-oriented discussions tended to be better able to detect information as well as have a better understanding of democratic principles. However, in Indonesia, PKN learning is still dominated by lecture methods that make students passive

and lack the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills (Gunawan et al., 2023). This is a serious challenge because without adequate critical thinking skills, students will more easily receive and disseminate inaccurate information. The low ability of adolescents to sort out valid information is reflected in various studies. Research by Nurfazri et al. (2024). Teens often lack the skills to distinguish credible sources of information. In addition, Rachmawati & Wijayanti (2022) in the Journal of Civic Education revealed that the lack of understanding of democratic values in social media exacerbates political polarization among adolescents, which is exacerbated by social media algorithms that reinforce certain views.

To address this issue, project-based and discussion-based learning models have been shown to help students analyze information more deeply and build data-driven opinions (Amalia et al., 2023). Ekstrom & Shehata (2021) also showed that civics learning that emphasizes critical thinking skills can reduce adolescents' tendency to spread fake news. By integrating digital literacy in the PKn curriculum, students can be better prepared to face information challenges in the digital era. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of Civic Education in warding off hoaxes and political polarization among adolescents through literature review. The focus is on civic education strategies to build resilience to disinformation and reduce the impact of political polarization. Referring to Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn, this study will explore learning methods that develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills to ward off hoaxes, as well as identify the most effective methods in increasing students' critical awareness to become responsible and active citizens in democratic life.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a *qualitative content analysis* method with a *thematic technique approach* to selected literature which refers to the book Civic Education What Makes Students Learn (1998) by Richard G. Niemi and Jane Junn which is related to the role of Civic Education in counteracting hoaxes and political polarization in adolescents. The *qualitative content analysis* method is used to systematically examine texts to identify patterns, meanings, and conceptual relationships in the literature (Krippendorff, 2018). Meanwhile, a *thematic technique approach* is applied to group findings into key themes that have emerged from various empirical and theoretical studies in the last five years (2015–2024) (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The research subject is a source of literature relevant to civic education, digital literacy, and adolescent resilience to hoaxes and political polarization. The sources analyzed include reputable scientific journals, academic books, research reports, and documents from international organizations. The details of the subjects of the study are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Study Subject		
Source type	Sample Source	Selection Criteria
International Scientific Journal	Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis	Indexed, topic-relevant journals published within the last 5 years
National Scientific Journal	SINTA, Journal of Civics, Journal of Education	Reputable national journal, has a DOI, is relevant to civic education
Academic Books	Springer, Routledge	Books with academic reviews related to civic education and digital literacy
Policy Document	Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education and Culture.	Education policies related to hoaxes and political polarization

The analysis process in this study is carried out systematically through several stages which include source selection, qualitative content analysis with thematic techniques, and secondary data analysis. The following is a detailed table of procedures used in this study:

Table 2. Analysis Procedure		
Source Selection	Qualitative Content Analysis with Thematic Technique	Secondary Data Analysis
1. The literature was collected from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Springer, Taylor & Francis, SINTA, as well as reputable national journals with the keywords: civic education, digital literacy, political polarization, hoax prevention, adolescents.	1. Thematic Coding: Identifying key themes that emerged from various studies on the effectiveness of Civic Education in improving digital literacy and critical thinking of adolescents (Misirli & Ergün, 2021,	1. Data are analyzed using thematic techniques to identify key patterns that emerge from various literature sources (OECD, 2022,
2. The inclusion criteria include publications in the last ten years (2015–2024), outside of secondary data sources and journal articles with strong methodologies, and studies relevant to civic education and digital literacy.	2. Comparison of Findings: Analyze the similarities and differences in research results related to the role of Civic Education in counteracting hoaxes and political polarization.	2. The synthesis of research results is used to formulate recommendations in improving the effectiveness of Civic Education in counteracting hoaxes and political polarization (Rachmawati & Wijayanti, 2022,
3. The exclusion criteria include opinion articles, unverified publications, and studies that are not relevant to the context of the study.	3. Contrast Analysis: Identifying differences in approaches and research gaps in the implementation of Civic Education in different countries (Mason & Metzger, 2023,	
	4. Critical Evaluation: Assessing the methodology and relevance of each study in the context of education in Indonesia (Gunawan et al., 2023,	

Using the *thematic technique approach*, this study is expected to provide comprehensive insights related to the effectiveness of Civic Education in building adolescent critical awareness in the digital era.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* written by Richard G. Niemi & Jane Junn with Yale University Press in 1998 with a total of 176 pages with ISBN 978-0300072471 discusses how civic education can shape students' understanding of politics and government, particularly at the high school level in the United States (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Niemi and Junn

used data from the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of civic education and the factors that influence learning success in this area. This book provides valuable insights into how students absorb political knowledge as well as how the education system can be improved to form more informed and active citizens in democracy (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Civic education is considered an important element in democracy because it helps to form citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations. Niemi and Junn examined the extent to which this education is effective in improving students' understanding of politics and government. In this book, the Exposure-Selection model is introduced, which explains how students acquire and absorb knowledge about citizenship. This model consists of two main stages, namely Exposure, which shows how often students obtain political information through curriculum, media, and everyday experiences, and Selection, which reflects how much students are able to understand, absorb, and remember the information they receive (Niemi & Junn, 1998).

The book also explains the factors that affect the effectiveness of civic education, including the school curriculum, the teaching methods used by teachers, the social and family environment, and the role of media in shaping students' understanding of politics. Niemi and Junn highlight that students who learn by active learning methods, such as discussion, debate, and political simulation, tend to understand the material better than those who only passively receive information through lectures (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Although civic education has a very important role, there are some challenges faced in its implementation. One of the main obstacles is that the teaching method is still less interactive and memorized-based, so students lack involvement in understanding political concepts in depth. Many students feel that civic learning is not directly related to their daily lives, so they are less motivated to understand and apply it. Less supportive social environments, such as lack of political discussion at home and at school, are also a challenge in improving the effectiveness of civic education (Niemi & Junn, 1998).

To overcome these challenges, Niemi and Junn suggested various strategies that can be applied to increase the effectiveness of civic education. The use of teaching methods based on discussions, debates, election simulations, and students' involvement in social activities can increase their understanding and interest in civic issues. (Niemi & Junn, 1998). The book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* shows that civic education can shape active and politically conscious citizens, especially with interactive teaching methods. Niemi and Junn emphasized the importance of giving students the opportunity to engage in hands-on discussions and practice so that they understand the importance of participation in democracy. This book is an important reference for educators, policymakers, and the public to improve the quality of civic education (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Civic education also helps adolescents understand hoaxes and political polarization, improve media literacy, and reduce political polarization, with the important role of teachers in their implementation.

The Influence of Civic Education on Adolescents' Understanding of Hoaxes and Political Polarization

The book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* shows that effective civic education improves students' understanding of social and political issues. This research states that students who receive a comprehensive citizenship education not only learn rights and obligations, but also how to understand information in complex political and social contexts (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Similar findings were also revealed by Lestari et al. (2020), who stated that citizenship education strengthens adolescents' ability to sort out correct information and avoid hoaxes. As Torney-Purta emphasized, open discussion and critical

learning in civics education can form a critical attitude towards circulating information, including hoaxes on social media. Citizenship education also plays a role in shaping the character and identity of the nation, making good citizens and smart citizens to face world developments in the era of competition (Naibaho et al., 2024).

1. Civic Education as a Strategy to Reduce Political Polarization. Political polarization did not occur in an empty space, but as a result of the post-1998 reform political changes. Reform opens up a more open democratic space, allowing the emergence of various political parties and ideologies. However, it has also triggered increasingly sharp differences between political groups, exacerbating polarization. Society is becoming more divided, both in elections and in everyday political interactions, with social media exacerbating those divisions. (Ismanto, 2023)
2. Challenges and Obstacles in the Implementation of Civic Education. The book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* highlights challenges in the implementation of civic education, such as the indiscipline of teachers and students, as well as the influence of foreign cultures that erode local culture. Another challenge is the variation in the quality of civic education that affects the effectiveness of learning, which necessitates the development of a curriculum that is more flexible and responsive to social and political changes (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The book also shows that civic education can equip students with essential skills in dealing with social and political challenges in the digital age, including hoaxes and political polarization. Teaching based on media literacy, open discussion, and respect for political differences will help adolescents reduce the negative impact of misinformation and political tensions. With the support of trained teachers and a responsive curriculum, civic education can create a younger generation that is smarter and wiser in dealing with socio-political problems (Suhardiyansyah et al., 2016).

Discussion

The Role of Civic Education in Improving Digital Literacy and Adolescents' Critical Thinking Skills against Hoaxes and Political Polarization

Citizenship Education plays an important role in preparing adolescents to face the challenges of the digital world, including hoaxes and political polarization. In this context, civic education not only teaches knowledge about the state and government, but also trains students to think critically and have a wise attitude in responding to the information they receive through digital media. Effective civic education, as discussed by Torney-Purta et al. (2001) in *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*, suggests that learning that focuses on developing critical thinking skills and understanding of the political process will help students understand the impact of hoaxes and political polarization. With good teaching, students can recognize hoaxes and avoid falling into misinformation that is widely circulated in the digital world. The book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn* (Niemi & Junn, 1998) also emphasizes the importance of integrating civic values in education that prepares students to be active and critical in socio-political life. By equipping students with a foundational knowledge of democratic values and media literacy skills, civic education can reduce political polarization and raise awareness of the importance of accurate information.

Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Civic Education in Counteracting Hoaxes and Reducing Political Polarization in Adolescents

Some of the factors that affect the effectiveness of civics education in warding off hoaxes and reducing political polarization include: Participatory Learning Methods: Torney-Purta et al. (2001) state that learning that involves discussion, debate, and real-case analysis is effective in

improving students' critical thinking skills. Participatory learning helps students understand the impact of political and information issues, including hoaxes on social media. Role of Teachers: Teachers have a crucial role in teaching civic values and setting positive examples in the use of media. By creating an environment that supports open discussion and problem-solving, teachers help students think critically about information, especially political issues. Influence of Social Media and Social Environment: Social media is very influential in spreading hoaxes and exacerbating political polarization. Therefore, civic education needs to integrate media literacy so that students can choose information wisely and recognize hoaxes. Sari et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of media literacy in civic education to prevent hoaxes in the digital era.

Strategies That Can Be Applied in Civic Education to Build Awareness and Attitudes of Adolescents in the Face of Hoaxes and Political Polarization

Some strategies that can be applied in civic education to overcome hoaxes and political polarization are: Media Literacy Education: According to Sari et al. (2021), it is important to teach students how to verify information, recognize hoaxes, and understand the role of social media algorithms in shaping public opinion. Good media literacy will help students become smarter and critical consumers of information about hoaxes. Case-Based Learning: Using relevant case studies, such as hoax cases that have occurred or polarizing political events, can help students to understand the social and political dynamics that occur. Case-based learning allows students to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. Open Discussion and Debate: Open discussion and healthy debate on social and political issues can increase students' awareness of diversity of opinion and reduce the tendency to get caught up in polarization. This approach also teaches students to listen with empathy and respect differences. Collaboration with Parents and Society: Empowering parents and communities in the learning process is essential. With good collaboration between schools, parents, and the community, the values of civic education can be applied consistently outside the school environment, thereby strengthening the formation of students' character in facing the challenges of hoaxes and polarization.

CONCLUSION

Civic Education has a strategic role in equipping adolescents with critical thinking skills and digital literacy to ward off hoaxes and reduce political polarization. The results of the study show that a deep understanding of democracy, tolerance, and the ability to sort out valid information can shape wiser individuals in managing political differences. Therefore, the integration of digital literacy materials into the Civic Education curriculum is an urgent need. In the long term, this research opens up opportunities for the development of more in-depth follow-up studies, especially in measuring the effectiveness of certain learning methods in increasing adolescents' critical power towards digital information. Further studies can be carried out with an empirical approach based on secondary data as well as experimental research in various educational environments. Thus, Civic Education is not only an informative subject, but also a transformative instrument in building a more intelligent society and tolerant of different political views.

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