



Understanding Civic Literacy Among Non-Civic Education Students After Completing a Pancasila and Civic Education Course: A Case Study of Language Department Students

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Abstract

Civic literacy is an essential competency that enables university students to participate responsibly in democratic life. The Civic Education course plays a strategic role in developing students' civic understanding, including those from non-civics disciplines. This study aims to explore the civic literacy of Language Department students after completing the Civic Education course, identify the learning factors that influence its development, and formulate relevant instructional strategies to strengthen civic literacy. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants were first-year students from the Indonesian Language Education and English Language Education programs at Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka who had completed the Civic Education course. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that the Civic Education course contributed to a broader understanding of civic literacy, encompassing citizens' rights and responsibilities, respect for diversity, social participation, and democratic responsibility. This understanding was reflected in students' academic and social lives through their participation in classroom discussions, student organizations, and engagement with social issues. The development of civic literacy was influenced by the relevance of learning materials, participatory teaching methods, lecturers' roles as facilitators, and students' social experiences. The study recommends strengthening Civic Education through case-based learning, reflective discussions, the integration of current issues, and digital literacy to support the sustainable development of students' civic literacy.

Keywords: Civic awareness; digital citizenship; higher education; social participation; participatory learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Civic literacy is an essential competency that university students need to participate responsibly in democratic societies in the twenty-first century. It encompasses not only knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities, constitutional principles, and political systems, but also the ability to understand public issues and use that knowledge to make informed decisions in democratic life (Schmitt et al., 2024). Contemporary citizenship education scholarship recognizes civic literacy as a foundation for effective civic participation and democratic engagement (Kalev et al., 2025). In higher education, strengthening civic literacy is crucial for preparing graduates who are academically competent and socially engaged (Assante et al., 2022). It also supports the development of social awareness, commitment to democratic values, and the capacity to address complex public issues in an era of globalization and digital transformation (Tokovska et al., 2023). These competencies are increasingly important because university students occupy a strategic position as young intellectuals



and agents of social change who contribute to democratic life through active and responsible civic engagement (Younis et al., 2026).

The importance of civic literacy has become more evident with the expansion of digital public spaces, where students can access, create, and disseminate information rapidly. Digital technologies have broadened opportunities for civic and political participation through various forms of online engagement (Sadat, 2025). However, the growing accessibility of information has also introduced challenges, including misinformation, disinformation, information manipulation, and social polarization, all of which can affect the civic awareness of young people (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026). In this context, students require not only academic literacy but also critical digital literacy that enables them to evaluate information, reflect on public issues, and participate responsibly in digital environments (Schmitt et al., 2024). Digital civic literacy is likewise associated with respect for diversity, democratic dialogue, and ethical civic behavior in online settings (Tokovska et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening civic literacy has become a fundamental objective of higher education to cultivate democratic, responsible, and adaptable citizens who can navigate the challenges of contemporary digital societies (Assante et al., 2022; Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025).

Despite its importance, the development of civic literacy among university students remains a challenge in higher education. Previous studies indicate that many students experience a gap between civic knowledge and their ability to translate that knowledge into meaningful civic participation and social engagement (Younis et al., 2026). This condition suggests that citizenship is not always understood as a social practice that requires responsibility, reflection, and commitment to democratic values in everyday life (Erdal & Kennelly, 2024). Limited civic literacy may weaken the quality of public participation and reduce young citizens' capacity to respond constructively to social and political issues (Schmitt et al., 2024). Furthermore, insufficient skills in evaluating information and understanding digital public spaces may increase students' vulnerability to misinformation, disinformation, and opinion manipulation (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026). Within this context, the Civic Education course serves as an important platform for developing students' civic knowledge, attitudes, and skills that support democratic citizenship (Kalev et al., 2025). Civic education also plays a significant role in fostering critical thinking, social awareness, and participatory competencies needed to address contemporary democratic challenges (Assante et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how the Civic Education course shapes civic literacy among students from different academic disciplines, particularly within rapidly evolving digital societies (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025).

A growing body of research has highlighted the contribution of citizenship education to strengthening students' civic literacy. Sukmayadi et al. (2024) found that cooperative learning and case-based instruction in Civic Education courses enhanced students' critical thinking through civic literacy development. Similarly, Sukmayadi et al. (2025) reported that project-based learning effectively improved students' understanding of democracy, national identity, and social responsibility as key dimensions of civic literacy. Kothen et al. (2025) further demonstrated that political education grounded in dialogue and contemporary issues can strengthen students' analytical capacity, conceptual understanding of citizenship, and civic dispositions. In addition, Masi et al., (2026) showed that digital case-based learning strategies significantly improved students' civic literacy. Nurmansyah et al. (2026) also emphasized the role of digital literacy in fostering civic awareness by strengthening digital ethics and participation in digital public spaces.

Although these studies demonstrate the effectiveness of various instructional approaches in promoting civic literacy, most focus on evaluating learning strategies, developing critical thinking skills, political education, or digital literacy (Masi et al., 2026; Sukmayadi et al., 2024). Moreover, previous research has primarily involved students enrolled in Civic Education programs or has examined civic literacy within broader educational contexts (Kothen et al., 2025; Sukmayadi et al., 2025). In contrast, studies that specifically explore how students from non-civics disciplines understand civic literacy after completing the Civic Education course remain limited. Research examining the experiences and interpretations of civic literacy among Language Department students is particularly scarce, despite their distinct academic backgrounds compared with students in social sciences or Civic Education programs. Likewise, little attention has been given to civic literacy in regional universities, including Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers a detailed exploration of civic literacy among Language Department students after completing the Civic Education course. The study is situated within a regional university context that has received limited attention in civic literacy research. Unlike previous studies that primarily assessed the effectiveness of instructional models, this research focuses on students' experiences, interpretations, and understandings of civic literacy developed through their engagement with the course. Specifically, the study aims to explore students' civic literacy, identify the learning factors that shape its development, and formulate instructional strategies to strengthen civic literacy among university students. The findings are expected to contribute to the theoretical advancement of civic literacy research in higher education. They may also provide an empirical foundation for developing more contextualized and participatory Civic Education instruction that is responsive to the characteristics of students across different academic disciplines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic Literacy in Higher Education

Civic literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand the concepts, values, and practices of citizenship that are necessary for participation in society and public life. It extends beyond knowledge of rights, responsibilities, democracy, and constitutional principles to include the capacity to understand public issues and demonstrate attitudes and behaviors consistent with democratic values (Schmitt et al., 2024). Contemporary citizenship education scholarship conceptualizes civic literacy as a multidimensional competency that integrates civic knowledge, critical thinking, social participation, and ethical responsibility (Kalev et al., 2025). These competencies provide an essential foundation for effective civic engagement in increasingly complex and digitalized societies (Tokovska et al., 2023). Within higher education, civic literacy is regarded as a key competency that enables students to fulfill their roles as responsible citizens and contribute constructively to public life (Younis et al., 2026). Its importance has grown in response to digital transformation, globalization, expanding information flows, and evolving patterns of social interaction that continue to reshape citizenship practices among younger generations (Assante et al., 2022).

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in developing students' civic literacy through learning experiences that promote democratic values, national identity, and social responsibility. Research has shown that higher education environments contribute significantly to students' ability to engage with public issues, participate in democratic processes, and develop an awareness of the common good (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025). As young intellectuals, university students are expected not only to acquire academic expertise within their disciplines but also to understand their responsibilities within social and political life (Erdal & Kennelly, 2024). Strong civic literacy enables students to understand societal issues more comprehensively, evaluate information critically, and make responsible decisions in both public and digital spaces (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026). Furthermore, civic literacy has been associated with greater civic engagement, stronger democratic participation, and enhanced capacity to foster inclusive dialogue in diverse societies (Younis et al., 2026). Therefore, strengthening civic literacy remains a central objective of higher education in preparing graduates who possess both academic excellence and the civic competencies needed to address the challenges of twenty-first-century democracies (Kalev et al., 2025; Schmitt et al., 2024).

The Role of the Civic Education Course in Strengthening Civic Literacy

The Civic Education course serves a strategic function in developing students' understanding of citizenship. Through this course, students are introduced to Pancasila values, democratic principles, human rights, constitutional foundations, and other aspects of civic life that underpin democratic societies (Kalev et al., 2025). The course functions not only as a vehicle for knowledge transmission but also as a platform for developing civic competencies, including critical thinking, responsible decision-making, and participation in public life (Schmitt et al., 2024). Within higher education, civic education contributes to the development of social awareness and students' commitment to democracy, justice, and social responsibility (Erdal & Kennelly, 2024). Its role has become increasingly relevant in the digital era, where students are expected to engage critically with public issues and participate ethically in both physical and digital spaces (Assante et al., 2022). Consequently, the Civic Education course is expected to help students connect civic concepts with social realities while

strengthening their capacity to act as active and responsible citizens (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025).

A growing body of research has demonstrated the contribution of the Civic Education course to the development of civic literacy. Sukmayadi et al. (2024) found that cooperative learning and case-based instruction enhanced students' understanding of civic issues and increased their engagement in the learning process. Similarly, Sukmayadi et al. (2025) reported that project-based learning effectively strengthened civic literacy, particularly in relation to democracy, national identity, and social responsibility. These findings are consistent with Schmitt et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of contextual and participatory learning approaches for civic literacy development in the digital age. Assante et al. (2022) likewise found that instructional practices encouraging critical reflection and active student engagement contributed to stronger civic and digital citizenship competencies. In addition, Younis et al. (2026) demonstrated that learning experiences involving social engagement and discussions of public issues were positively associated with higher levels of civic participation among students. Collectively, these studies suggest that the quality of Civic Education instruction, particularly when supported by active, collaborative, and project-based learning approaches, is closely linked to the development of civic literacy in higher education (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025; Sukmayadi et al., 2025).

Dimensions of Students' Civic Literacy

Students' civic literacy can be understood through several interrelated dimensions. These dimensions include an understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities, awareness of democratic values, respect for diversity, and the ability to participate responsibly in social life (Bombardelli, 2021). Civic literacy also encompasses a set of competencies that enable individuals to understand public issues, evaluate information critically, and engage in decision-making processes that affect collective life (Schmitt et al., 2024). Within the framework of democratic competence, the ability to respect differences, engage in dialogue, and demonstrate social responsibility constitutes an essential component of civic literacy that should be cultivated through higher education (Tokovska et al., 2023). Moreover, digital transformation has expanded the scope of civic literacy to include ethical and responsible participation in digital environments (Apata et al., 2025). Civic literacy is also reflected in students' understanding of their position as members of society who possess both rights and responsibilities toward their social, political, and cultural environments (Kalev et al., 2025). Therefore, civic literacy extends beyond knowledge acquisition and includes how students interpret and apply civic values in their everyday lives (Assante et al., 2022).

Kothen et al. (2025) argue that civic literacy can be strengthened through learning environments that encourage dialogue, discussions of contemporary issues, and student involvement in academic and extracurricular activities. This view is consistent with the findings of Sukmayadi et al. (2025), who reported that project-based learning and social problem-solving activities enhanced students' understanding of democracy, national identity, and social responsibility. Similarly, Younis et al. (2026) found that participatory experiences in higher education contribute to greater civic engagement and readiness for democratic participation. Sadat (2025) further emphasized that young people's involvement in public and digital activities plays a significant role in developing political awareness and meaningful participation skills. Students who have opportunities to discuss public issues and engage in organizational activities tend to demonstrate stronger analytical abilities and higher levels of civic literacy than those whose learning experiences are primarily theoretical (Videla et al., 2025). These findings suggest that civic literacy develops not only through formal classroom instruction but also through students' social experiences and participation in various forms of public engagement during their academic lives (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025).

Civic Literacy in the Digital Era and the Context of Language Department Students

Digital technology has transformed the ways individuals access information, communicate, and participate in public life. These changes have also reshaped citizenship practices, as digital spaces have become important arenas for opinion formation, information exchange, and civic participation (Schmitt et al., 2024). In digital societies, civic literacy is increasingly associated with the ability to access, evaluate, and use information critically in public decision-making processes (Allaste & Waechter, 2025). Previous studies indicate that technological developments have broadened the meaning of citizenship to include digital citizenship, digital ethics, and technology-mediated social

participation (Putri et al., 2025; Tokovska et al., 2023). As a result, civic literacy cannot be separated from individuals' capacity to use information responsibly and engage in constructive communication within digital public spaces (Assante et al., 2022). University students, as members of the digital generation, encounter both opportunities and challenges in fulfilling their civic roles amid increasingly complex information environments. These challenges include misinformation, social polarization, and information manipulation, all of which may affect the quality of democratic participation (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026; Schmitt et al., 2024).

Nurmansyah et al. (2026) emphasized the important role of digital literacy in fostering students' civic awareness within the context of digital democracy. The ability to interpret information accurately, respond thoughtfully to public issues, and maintain ethical conduct in digital spaces has become an essential aspect of contemporary citizenship (Allaste & Waechter, 2025). Masi et al. (2026) likewise demonstrated that digital case-based learning strategies can significantly strengthen students' civic literacy. Tirza et al. (2025) further found that integrating digital literacy and critical thinking into citizenship education contributes to the development of active citizenship among university students. In addition, Fadhillah et al. (2026) reported that digital citizenship-oriented media and learning technologies can enhance students' civic communication competencies in higher education. These findings are particularly relevant for Language Department students because their academic training emphasizes reading, writing, discourse analysis, and public communication. Such competencies can support students' ability to interpret social issues, evaluate public information, and engage in inclusive democratic dialogue (Erdal & Kennelly, 2024). Consequently, these skills have considerable potential to strengthen civic literacy when developed through contextual and reflective Civic Education instruction that is closely connected to students' experiences in navigating digital public spaces (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025; Sukmayadi et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the civic literacy of Language Department students after completing the Civic Education course (Creswell, 2019; Yin, 2018). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of civic literacy developed through the learning process. The case study design was adopted to examine this phenomenon within a specific educational context and to generate a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences (Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in the Indonesian Language Education and English Language Education programs at Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka. The participants were first-year students who had completed the Civic Education course. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in the course and their ability to reflect on their learning experiences. This sampling strategy ensured that the collected data were relevant to the focus and objectives of the study.

Instruments and Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument responsible for designing the study, collecting data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions (Creswell, 2019). To support the data collection process, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the research objectives. The guide included questions related to students' understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities, respect for diversity, democratic values, participation in campus life, and responses to social issues associated with citizenship. The use of semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for probing and follow-up questions while maintaining alignment with the study focus (Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Kallio et al., 2016).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to explore students' experiences of the Civic Education course and their interpretations of civic literacy. Documents, including instructional materials and other relevant records, were used to complement and verify the interview data. This combination of sources provided a richer understanding of the research context and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

The quality of the interview protocol was established through expert judgment involving two lecturers with expertise in Civic Education and qualitative research methodology. Data trustworthiness was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews and documents. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Their identities were kept confidential in accordance with ethical research principles.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts and documentary evidence were selected, simplified, and organized according to the objectives of the study. This process enabled the researchers to identify information relevant to students' civic literacy after completing the Civic Education course.

The condensed data were then presented through narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging trends. Data display was organized around major themes related to civic literacy, including citizens' rights and responsibilities, respect for diversity, democratic awareness, campus participation, and responses to social issues.

The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions throughout the analytical process. Conclusions were developed by examining relationships among the emerging themes and were verified through triangulation and peer discussion. These procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility of the findings and ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the data collected from participants (Martins & Reis, 2026).

RESULTS

Students' Civic Literacy after Completing the Civic Education Course

The interview findings indicate that students experienced a shift in their understanding of civic literacy after completing the Civic Education course. Prior to taking the course, most participants viewed citizenship primarily as a formal status associated with national identity and compliance with regulations. After completing the course, their understanding expanded to include citizens' rights and responsibilities, respect for diversity, social participation, and responsibility within society. Students began to recognize that civic literacy extends beyond knowledge of the state and government. It also involves the ability to fulfill one's role as a responsible citizen in various social contexts. As one participant explained:

"Before taking the Civic Education course, I only understood citizenship as being an Indonesian citizen and following the rules. After completing the course, I realized that citizenship is also about respecting others, fulfilling social responsibilities, and contributing to society." (P3)

This broader understanding was also reflected in how students described the relationship between rights and responsibilities. They no longer viewed rights as entitlements that could be claimed without accountability. Instead, they regarded rights and responsibilities as interconnected dimensions of citizenship. This shift suggests a meaningful change in how students interpreted the concept of citizenship after participating in the course. Another participant stated:

"I came to understand that citizens not only have rights that must be fulfilled by the state, but also responsibilities that they must carry out. Previously, I focused more on rights, but after taking the course, I realized that both must go hand in hand." (P7)

Overall, these findings suggest that the Civic Education course contributed to a broader understanding of civic literacy among students. Civic literacy was understood as a combination of civic knowledge, social awareness, respect for national values, and responsibility within society.

Manifestations of Civic Literacy in Students' Academic and Social Lives

Students' understanding of civic literacy was not limited to conceptual knowledge but was also reflected in their academic and social lives. Participants reported becoming more open to differing opinions, more appreciative of diversity, and more actively involved in campus activities. They also demonstrated a stronger awareness of the importance of maintaining harmonious

relationships with peers from different cultural, religious, and regional backgrounds. One participant remarked:

"I am now more confident in expressing my opinions during class discussions. At the same time, I have learned that opinions should be expressed respectfully and with consideration for different viewpoints." (P2)

Manifestations of civic literacy were also evident in students' involvement in student organizations and social activities. Participants who were active in organizations explained that these experiences helped them understand democratic practices, collaboration, and collective responsibility in a more concrete way. Through interactions with students from diverse backgrounds, they learned how to build consensus, manage disagreements, and work toward common goals. Another participant noted:

"In student organizations, I learned how to discuss issues, make decisions collectively, and collaborate with people from different backgrounds. These experiences helped me better understand democratic practices in everyday life." (P8)

Beyond campus life, several participants reported becoming more concerned about social issues within their communities. They expressed a willingness to engage in social activities and demonstrated greater caution when responding to information circulated through digital media. These findings suggest that students had begun to translate their understanding of civic literacy into concrete forms of participation and behavior in both academic and social settings.

Learning Factors Influencing Students' Civic Literacy

The analysis revealed several interconnected learning factors that influenced the development of students' civic literacy. The factor mentioned most frequently was the relevance of course content to everyday life. Students believed that discussions of democracy, human rights, diversity, constitutional principles, and current social issues made the Civic Education course more meaningful because these topics were directly connected to their experiences as students and citizens. One participant explained:

"The course was not limited to theory. The lecturer often connected the material to events taking place in society, which made it easier for us to understand its relevance to everyday life." (P4)

In addition to course content, students identified instructional methods as an important factor in shaping their understanding. Group discussions, presentations, case studies, and question-and-answer sessions provided opportunities to express opinions and consider multiple perspectives on civic issues. These activities helped students connect theoretical concepts with their own experiences and viewpoints. Another participant commented:

"Class discussions were very helpful because we could hear different opinions. They helped me realize that a single issue can be viewed from many perspectives." (P6)

Students also emphasized the importance of lecturers' roles as facilitators of learning. Rather than simply delivering content, lecturers encouraged students to reflect, ask questions, and express their views openly. Furthermore, participation in student organizations and social interactions on campus reinforced the understanding gained through the Civic Education course. One participant stated:

"The lecturer gave every student an opportunity to speak and participate in discussions. The classroom became more active, which made the material easier to understand." (P10)

These findings suggest that students' civic literacy developed through a combination of contextualized course content, participatory teaching methods, lecturers' facilitative roles, and social experiences gained during campus life.

Strategies for Strengthening Civic Literacy through the Civic Education Course

Based on students' learning experiences, several strategies emerged as particularly relevant for strengthening civic literacy. The most frequently mentioned strategy was case-based learning that addresses real-world social issues. Students believed that analyzing authentic cases made learning more engaging because it allowed them to see direct connections between civic concepts and the realities of society. As one participant explained:

"I understand the material more easily when the lecturer uses real cases from society. We can discuss the issues and develop solutions based on what we have learned." (P5)

Students also emphasized the value of reflective discussions within the Civic Education course. They argued that discussion activities create opportunities to exchange ideas, understand different perspectives, and develop the ability to express opinions responsibly. In addition, participants considered the inclusion of current issues important because it made the course more relevant to the experiences and concerns of contemporary youth. Another participant stated:

"When we discuss issues that are currently being debated in society, I become more interested in the class. The material feels much closer to our lives than simply reading theories from textbooks." (P9)

Another strategy frequently proposed by students was the integration of digital literacy into the Civic Education course. Participants recognized that much of their civic knowledge is acquired through digital media. Consequently, the ability to evaluate, filter, and use information responsibly has become increasingly important. They suggested that the course should not focus solely on theoretical civic concepts but should also provide contextual and participatory learning experiences that address the realities of digital life. As one participant explained:

"Students today obtain a great deal of information from social media. Therefore, I think the Civic Education course should also teach us how to evaluate information and use digital media responsibly." (P11)

These findings indicate that strengthening civic literacy requires instructional strategies that connect learning content with social realities, encourage active student participation, and integrate digital literacy in ways that are relevant to students' contemporary experiences.

DISCUSSION

Transformation of Civic Literacy through the Civic Education Course

The findings indicate that the Civic Education course contributed to a transformation in students' understanding of civic literacy. Students no longer viewed citizenship merely as an administrative status associated with being a member of a nation-state. Instead, they understood it as a combination of knowledge, values, and responsibilities that should be enacted in social life. This shift suggests that the Civic Education course functions not only as a means of transmitting civic concepts but also as a process of fostering deeper and more meaningful civic awareness. The findings demonstrate that citizenship learning experiences can encourage students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society (Kalev et al., 2025).

These findings are consistent with Sukmayadi et al. (2025), who emphasized the important role of Civic Education in strengthening students' civic literacy through the development of democratic understanding, national identity, and social responsibility. The results also support the findings of Sukmayadi et al. (2024), which showed that active student engagement in citizenship learning can broaden students' understanding of civic issues. Similar conclusions were reported by Schmitt et al. (2024), who found that contextual and dialogic citizenship education helps students engage with public issues in more critical and reflective ways. In the present study, this expanded understanding was reflected in students' ability to connect the concepts of rights and responsibilities with everyday realities, including contemporary social issues and the dynamics of digital public spaces (Karakatsani & Pliogou, 2026; Tokovska et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that students increasingly perceive citizenship as a social practice that requires active engagement within both academic settings and broader society. This perspective demonstrates that civic literacy develops not only at the level of knowledge but also through civic awareness and action-oriented dispositions that encourage democratic participation (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025). These findings reinforce the argument that the effectiveness of the Civic Education course should not be measured solely by students' mastery of content. It should also be evaluated by their ability to interpret and internalize civic values in real-life contexts (Assante et al., 2022). The results are also consistent with the perspective of Erdal and Kennelly (2024), who argued that effective citizenship education should cultivate critical awareness and promote responsible social engagement as part of everyday citizenship practice.

Civic Literacy as a Social Practice in Students' Lives

This study found that the civic literacy developed through the Civic Education course was reflected in various forms of student participation within academic and social environments. Engagement in classroom discussions, student organizations, and social activities suggests that civic literacy extends beyond conceptual understanding and begins to take shape in everyday practice. These findings align with the view that civic literacy development is not only indicated by the acquisition of civic knowledge but also by individuals' ability to participate actively in social and democratic life (Schmitt et al., 2024). The findings further indicate that students perceive the university as a space for citizenship learning where democratic experiences can be developed directly. A campus environment that provides opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and social engagement can serve as an important setting for the development of civic competencies (Kalev et al., 2025).

The findings are closely related to those of Kothen et al. (2025), who reported that democratic and participatory academic environments contribute significantly to the strengthening of students' civic literacy. Through involvement in discussion forums and student organizations, individuals gain opportunities to understand diverse perspectives, develop tolerance, and learn collective decision-making processes. Similar conclusions were reported by Younis et al. (2026), who found that participatory experiences during university studies contribute to increased civic engagement and social awareness. In addition, Nurdianti and Khaedir (2026) demonstrated that learning environments that encourage community involvement and civic activities can strengthen students' civic engagement in the digital era. These conditions foster an understanding that citizenship involves not only the relationship between individuals and the state but also social interaction, collaboration, and shared responsibility in everyday life.

However, the findings also reveal that students' civic literacy was more evident within the context of campus life than in broader public participation. This result differs from the findings of Kothen et al. (2025), who reported that students' involvement in political activities and deliberative forums contributed substantially to the development of civic literacy. The discrepancy may be attributed to the characteristics of the participants in this study, who were first-year students with relatively limited experience in social and political engagement. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Al-Otaibi (2025), who argued that the development of civic skills and public participation is often influenced by academic experience, exposure to public issues, and opportunities for broader social involvement. Other studies have likewise suggested that students' civic engagement tends to develop gradually as they gain organizational experience, expand their social interactions, and participate in democratic activities throughout their university years (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025; Younis et al., 2026). Therefore, efforts to strengthen civic literacy should be sustained over time to provide students with broader opportunities to develop civic experiences beyond the academic environment.

Learning Factors Supporting the Development of Civic Literacy

The findings indicate that the development of students' civic literacy is influenced by the interplay among course content, instructional methods, lecturers' roles, and students' social experiences. Students were more likely to understand civic concepts when the learning materials were connected to real-world issues they encountered in their daily lives (Schmitt et al., 2024). This finding highlights the importance of contextual approaches in the Civic Education course to ensure that civic concepts are not perceived as abstract ideas detached from social realities (Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025). It also reinforces the view that learning experiences closely related to students' lives can facilitate the internalization of civic values while enhancing their ability to engage critically with public issues (Assante et al., 2022).

These findings are consistent with Sukmayadi et al. (2024), who emphasized that case-based learning and authentic experiences can strengthen students' understanding of civic issues. The results also support the findings of Sukmayadi et al. (2025), which demonstrated that student-centered learning models are more effective in promoting civic literacy than traditional approaches focused primarily on content delivery. Similar conclusions were reported by Schmitt et al. (2024), who found that dialogic and problem-based citizenship education helps students connect civic concepts with the realities of contemporary social life. In addition, Fadhilah et al. (2026) reported that participatory and

technology-enhanced learning approaches can increase students' engagement in citizenship education. In the present study, group discussions, presentations, and case analyses were the learning activities most frequently identified by students as helping them understand civic issues. These findings suggest that instructional practices that encourage interaction and critical reflection contribute significantly to the development of civic literacy.

The study also highlights the important role of lecturers as facilitators who create opportunities for dialogue and participation within the learning process. This role is particularly important because civic literacy develops through interaction, reflection, and the exchange of ideas among students (Erdal & Kennelly, 2024). The findings are consistent with Kothen et al. (2025), who demonstrated that democratic learning environments that welcome diverse perspectives support the development of civic competencies. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2026) found that integrating digital citizenship principles into citizenship education can strengthen students' democratic participation when lecturers effectively facilitate the learning process. These findings suggest that the success of the Civic Education course depends not only on the quality of the instructional content but also on lecturers' ability to foster democratic, participatory, and inclusive learning environments that encourage active student engagement.

Implications for Strengthening Civic Literacy in the Digital Era

One of the most important findings of this study is the need to integrate digital literacy into efforts to strengthen students' civic literacy. Participants recognized that much of the information related to social, political, and civic issues is now accessed through digital media. Consequently, the ability to understand, evaluate, and use information responsibly has become an essential component of contemporary citizenship.

This finding supports the argument advanced by Nurmansyah et al. (2026), who emphasized the important role of digital literacy in shaping students' civic awareness within the ecosystem of digital democracy. Students who possess strong information management skills are more likely to participate responsibly in digital public spaces. The results also align with the findings of Masi et al. (2026), who demonstrated that digital case-based learning strategies can significantly enhance students' civic literacy.

Based on these findings, efforts to strengthen civic literacy through the Civic Education course should focus on developing instructional strategies that are contextual, participatory, and responsive to the realities of digital society. Case-based learning, reflective discussions, and the analysis of current issues can serve as effective approaches for connecting civic concepts with students' lived experiences. Through such approaches, civic literacy is understood not merely as knowledge about citizenship but as the capacity to participate responsibly in democratic life, which is increasingly shaped by digital technologies and media.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the civic literacy of Language Department students after completing the Civic Education course at Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka. The findings indicate that the course contributed to a broader understanding of civic literacy among students. Citizenship was no longer perceived merely as a formal legal status but as a combination of knowledge, values, and responsibilities related to the exercise of rights and obligations, respect for diversity, social participation, and engagement in democratic life. This understanding was reflected in various academic and social practices, including participation in classroom discussions, involvement in student organizations, tolerance toward differing perspectives, and concern for social issues within society.

The study also found that the development of students' civic literacy was influenced by several learning factors, including the relevance of course content to everyday life, the use of participatory instructional methods, lecturers' roles as learning facilitators, and students' social experiences within the university environment. Based on these findings, strengthening civic literacy requires Civic Education instruction that is more contextual, dialogic, and grounded in students' lived experiences. Case-based learning, reflective discussions, the integration of current issues, and the incorporation of digital literacy into instruction represent promising strategies for enhancing both the understanding and practice of civic literacy in the era of digital democracy. The findings

contribute empirical evidence to the growing body of research on civic literacy in higher education, particularly among students from non-civics disciplines.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted only with first-year students enrolled in the Indonesian Language Education and English Language Education programs at a single university. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent students from other academic disciplines or higher education contexts. Second, the data were derived primarily from interviews and document analysis, meaning that the findings largely reflect participants' experiences and perceptions of the Civic Education course. Future research is encouraged to involve a more diverse range of participants from different academic programs and institutions. It may also benefit from employing additional data collection methods, such as participant observation or mixed-methods approaches, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of civic literacy among university students.

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