



The Role of Civic Education in Strengthening Political Literacy, Political Awareness, and Political Participation Among University Students: A Case Study at PGRI University Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Citizenship Education in strengthening political literacy, political awareness, and political participation among students at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. Employing an empirical qualitative approach with a case study design, the research collected data through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving Citizenship Education lecturers and undergraduate students who had completed the course. The findings indicate that Citizenship Education contributes significantly to the development of political literacy by enhancing students' understanding of democratic institutions, constitutional principles, critical political analysis, and information verification skills in digital environments. The learning process also fosters political awareness through the internalization of civic values, reflective engagement with public issues, and the cultivation of democratic responsibility. Political participation is strengthened through increased involvement in student organizations, civic discussions, digital engagement, and community-oriented activities. Democratic classroom practices, contextual learning, and dialogical interactions emerged as important factors supporting civic competence development. The study demonstrates that Citizenship Education functions as a strategic mechanism for preparing politically literate, critically aware, and actively engaged citizens capable of contributing to democratic life in contemporary society.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Political Literacy, Political Awareness, Political Participation, Civic Competence.



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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary democratic landscape has been profoundly reshaped by digital transformation, the proliferation of political information across online platforms, and the increasing complexity of citizen engagement in public affairs. Across both established and emerging democracies, higher education institutions are expected not merely to transmit civic knowledge but to cultivate politically literate citizens capable of critically evaluating information, navigating ideological polarization, and participating constructively in democratic processes. Within this context, Citizenship Education has re-emerged as a strategic pedagogical instrument for strengthening democratic resilience by fostering political literacy, political awareness, and political participation among young adults. The significance of this educational mission has become increasingly evident as university students are simultaneously positioned as intensive consumers of digital information and as future civic leaders whose political orientations may shape the quality of democratic governance. Recent scholarship has emphasized that the integration of political education and digital literacy within Citizenship Education is essential for enabling students to critically interpret political information, resist misinformation, and develop informed civic engagement in increasingly digitalized societies (Yuliandari et al., 2023; Kothen et al., 2025).

Existing studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between Citizenship Education and various dimensions of civic and political competence, although the nature and magnitude of this relationship remain contested across different contexts. Research has shown that Citizenship Education contributes significantly to enhancing students' political literacy by improving their understanding of democratic institutions, constitutional principles, and public policy processes (Hidayati et al., 2022). Parallel investigations have revealed that political literacy functions as an important predictor of political participation, particularly among younger generations who rely heavily on digital media as

their primary source of political information (Pratama et al., 2022; Akbar et al., 2026). Studies focusing on Indonesian university students further indicate that Citizenship Education can strengthen political engagement by encouraging participation in electoral processes, organizational activities, and broader civic initiatives (Zebua et al., 2025). Nevertheless, a closer examination of this body of literature suggests that political literacy, political awareness, and political participation are frequently examined as separate outcomes rather than as interconnected dimensions of a broader civic competence framework, limiting the explanatory power of existing findings.

Despite the growing volume of research, several conceptual and empirical limitations remain insufficiently addressed. First, much of the existing literature relies on quantitative designs that prioritize the measurement of correlations while providing limited insight into the educational processes through which Citizenship Education shapes students' political consciousness and behavioral engagement. Second, political awareness is often treated as an implicit outcome embedded within political literacy or participation, resulting in conceptual ambiguity regarding its distinct role in democratic citizenship formation. Third, previous studies frequently focus on electoral behavior or political knowledge acquisition while overlooking the broader developmental trajectory that links civic learning experiences to reflective political awareness and sustained participation. Evidence from studies on youth political consciousness and first-time voters indicates that awareness, literacy, and participation may operate through complex and mutually reinforcing mechanisms rather than through simple linear relationships, suggesting the need for more contextually grounded investigations capable of capturing these dynamics in real educational settings (Ramadhan et al., 2026; Riski, 2025).

These limitations are particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where democratic consolidation increasingly depends on the quality of political engagement among younger generations. The rapid circulation of misinformation, ideological fragmentation within digital spaces, and declining trust in political institutions have generated new challenges for universities seeking to prepare students for responsible democratic citizenship. Political participation without adequate literacy may encourage susceptibility to manipulation, while political knowledge without corresponding awareness may fail to translate into meaningful civic action. Research conducted during recent socio-political transformations has highlighted the importance of strengthening civic competencies capable of fostering critical judgment, democratic responsibility, and active participation in both formal and informal political arenas (Nurgiansah, 2021). Consequently, understanding how Citizenship Education simultaneously contributes to political literacy, political awareness, and political participation represents not only an academic concern but also a practical imperative for democratic sustainability.

Positioning itself within this scholarly debate, the present study advances the argument that Citizenship Education should be understood as a multidimensional civic learning process whose effectiveness cannot be adequately assessed through isolated indicators of political knowledge or participation alone. Rather than examining political literacy, political awareness, and political participation as independent variables, this study conceptualizes them as interconnected dimensions of civic competence that are cultivated through pedagogical interaction, critical reflection, and experiential engagement. Such a perspective enables a more comprehensive understanding of how educational experiences influence students' democratic dispositions and political behavior. The selection of Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta as a case study is particularly relevant given its location within a historically significant center of student activism and democratic discourse, providing a context in which the interplay between civic education and political engagement can be examined in greater depth.

This study aims to analyze the role of Citizenship Education in strengthening political literacy, political awareness, and political participation among students at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta through an in-depth qualitative case study approach. The research seeks to contribute theoretically by developing a more integrated understanding of the relationships among these three dimensions within the broader framework of civic competence. Methodologically, it contributes by moving beyond predominantly quantitative approaches and providing a contextualized exploration of how educational practices, institutional environments, and student experiences collectively shape democratic citizenship in higher education settings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an empirical qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the role of Citizenship Education in strengthening students' political literacy, political awareness, and

political participation at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. A case study was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of civic learning processes within their natural educational context. Participants consisted of Citizenship Education lecturers and undergraduate students who had completed the Citizenship Education course and possessed relevant experiences related to civic and political engagement. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases capable of providing comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected between December 2025 and April 2026 through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the contribution of Citizenship Education to political literacy, awareness, and participation, while observations and institutional documents were utilized to contextualize and corroborate the interview findings.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by interview protocols, observation guidelines, and document review sheets developed in accordance with the study objectives and the civic competence framework. To enhance trustworthiness, data credibility was established through methodological and source triangulation by comparing information obtained from lecturers, students, observations, and documentary evidence. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification conducted iteratively throughout the research process. The analytical procedure focused on identifying recurring themes related to civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions as dimensions underpinning political literacy, political awareness, and political participation. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality through anonymization of personal information, and guaranteeing that the collected data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Citizenship Education in Strengthening Students' Political Literacy at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta

Findings from interviews and classroom observations revealed that Citizenship Education functions as a primary arena through which students construct political understanding beyond formal constitutional knowledge. Participants consistently reported that course discussions encouraged them to examine public issues from multiple perspectives rather than accepting political narratives at face value. Several students explained that exposure to contemporary political cases increased their ability to distinguish factual information from partisan claims. This pattern reflects the argument that Citizenship Education contributes significantly to the development of political literacy in democratic societies (Hidayati et al., 2022).

Data analysis identified civic knowledge as the most visible dimension emerging from the learning process. Students demonstrated a stronger understanding of constitutional principles, governmental structures, electoral mechanisms, and citizen rights after completing the course. Interview transcripts indicated that conceptual comprehension was frequently connected to current political events discussed during classroom activities. Similar trends have been identified in studies emphasizing the contribution of civic learning to political literacy development among young citizens (Nassa, 2024).

Classroom observations further showed that lecturers intentionally incorporated contemporary political issues into instructional activities. Discussions concerning elections, public policy controversies, and digital political campaigns were used as analytical learning materials rather than ideological content. Students noted that this pedagogical approach encouraged them to evaluate arguments using evidence and constitutional principles. Such findings align with the proposition that political education should prioritize critical interpretation rather than passive information reception (Yanda et al., 2024).

Interview data also revealed that students increasingly relied on verification practices when encountering political information on social media platforms. Many participants described comparing information across multiple sources before accepting political claims as credible. This behavioral change emerged after repeated classroom exercises focused on source evaluation and information assessment. Research on digital citizenship similarly emphasizes the importance of critical verification skills in contemporary political literacy formation (Yuliandari et al., 2023).

The qualitative evidence suggested that political literacy development was not limited to cognitive knowledge acquisition. Participants frequently associated literacy with the capacity to interpret political processes, evaluate competing narratives, and understand the societal implications of public decisions. Several students indicated that they became more confident in discussing political issues because they possessed stronger analytical foundations. This observation supports perspectives that define political literacy as a multidimensional civic competence rather than mere political knowledge accumulation (Kothén et al., 2025). To illustrate recurring themes emerging from interviews and observations, the categorization of political literacy indicators is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Emergent Indicators of Political Literacy Strengthened through Citizenship Education

Political Dimension	Literacy	Empirical Evidence from Participants	Frequency of Emergence
Constitutional Knowledge		Understanding rights, obligations, and state institutions	High
Critical Political Analysis		Evaluating public policies and political narratives	High
Information Verification Skills		Cross-checking information sources and identifying hoaxes	High
Democratic Skills	Discussion	Participating in evidence-based debates	Moderate
Digital Political Literacy		Assessing political content on social media	High

The patterns presented in Table 1 indicate that information verification skills and critical political analysis emerged as dominant themes across participant narratives. These findings suggest that political literacy within the Citizenship Education classroom extends beyond institutional knowledge toward practical competencies required in digital democracies. Students frequently connected their learning experiences with challenges encountered in online political environments. Comparable conclusions were reported in studies examining the relationship between digital literacy and civic engagement among younger generations (Sugara et al., 2026).

Another important finding concerns the relationship between political literacy and political confidence. Several participants reported that increased understanding reduced uncertainty when interpreting political developments. Students who initially avoided political discussions expressed greater willingness to engage in dialogue after developing stronger analytical capabilities. Similar observations have been documented in research emphasizing civic literacy as a prerequisite for meaningful democratic engagement (Matnuh et al., 2024).

The findings also revealed that political literacy was strengthened through dialogical interaction rather than one-directional instruction. Classroom exchanges allowed students to encounter contrasting viewpoints while maintaining academic standards of discussion. This process encouraged reflective judgment and reduced tendencies toward simplistic political interpretations. The role of dialogue in cultivating critical political reasoning has been highlighted within contemporary theories of civic education and political socialization (Hanif & Salsabillah, 2024).

Several participants emphasized that learning activities involving case analysis were more influential than conventional lectures. Real-world political issues enabled students to connect abstract democratic principles with observable social realities. The integration of contextual learning strengthened their capacity to recognize relationships between policy decisions and public welfare outcomes. Civic-oriented experiential learning has similarly been associated with stronger literacy outcomes among university students (Jati & Efendi, 2025).

The evidence collectively indicates that Citizenship Education at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta contributes to political literacy through the integration of civic knowledge, critical reasoning, digital verification practices, and contextual political analysis. Political literacy emerged not as a static body of knowledge but as an evolving competency shaped through interaction, reflection, and engagement with contemporary political realities. Students demonstrated increasing capacity to interpret information independently and evaluate political phenomena using democratic principles. Critical

literacy of this nature represents an essential foundation for democratic citizenship in increasingly complex information environments (Hisan et al., 2026).

The Role of Citizenship Education in Fostering Students' Political Awareness at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta

Interview findings demonstrated that Citizenship Education contributed substantially to the development of political awareness among students through reflective engagement with democratic values and public issues. Participants frequently described political awareness as a deeper understanding of their position and responsibility as citizens rather than merely possessing political information. Classroom discussions encouraged students to connect abstract civic principles with contemporary societal challenges. This tendency corresponds with the view that political awareness emerges through processes of civic reflection and democratic socialization (Tunggal, 2023).

Thematic analysis revealed that students increasingly perceived political issues as matters directly affecting social welfare and collective interests. Several participants explained that prior to taking the course, politics was often viewed as a distant sphere dominated by elites and institutional actors. Exposure to discussions concerning public policy, social justice, and citizen rights gradually altered this perception. Similar patterns have been identified in studies examining the formation of political consciousness among young citizens through civic education initiatives (Ramadhan et al., 2026).

Observational data indicated that lecturers intentionally created deliberative learning environments where students were encouraged to articulate opinions and critically evaluate public affairs. Students were not directed toward specific political preferences but were guided to assess arguments through constitutional and ethical frameworks. This pedagogical strategy appeared to cultivate a more mature understanding of political responsibility. Research concerning political education in higher education highlights the importance of democratic classroom climates in shaping civic awareness (Yanda et al., 2024).

Participants frequently associated political awareness with the ability to recognize the broader implications of governmental decisions on social life. Students reported increased sensitivity toward issues involving education policy, economic inequality, environmental governance, and public accountability. Such awareness was often accompanied by a stronger willingness to follow political developments and public debates. This observation supports arguments emphasizing the role of Citizenship Education in developing politically conscious citizens capable of evaluating governance outcomes (Nassa, 2024).

An important finding concerned the influence of digital information environments on awareness formation. Students acknowledged that social media provided extensive access to political information, yet they also recognized the risks associated with misinformation, manipulation, and ideological polarization. Classroom activities addressing digital citizenship encouraged more critical engagement with online political content. Comparable conclusions have been reported in studies examining democratic citizenship within digital ecosystems (Nurmansyah et al., 2026). To illustrate the dominant dimensions of political awareness identified during data analysis, the findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Emergent Dimensions of Political Awareness among Students

Dimension of Political Awareness	Empirical Indicators	Level of Emergence
Awareness of Civic Rights	Understanding constitutional rights and protections	High
Awareness of Civic Responsibilities	Recognition of citizen obligations and public accountability	High
Sensitivity to Public Issues	Concern regarding social and political developments	High
Democratic Tolerance	Acceptance of differing political viewpoints	Moderate

Dimension of Political Awareness	Empirical Indicators	Level of Emergence
Critical Media Awareness	Recognition of misinformation and bias	High

The data presented in Table 2 suggest that awareness of civic responsibilities and sensitivity toward public issues emerged consistently across interviews and observations. Participants frequently linked these dimensions to learning experiences emphasizing democratic accountability and constitutional citizenship. Political awareness appeared to develop through repeated opportunities for reflection rather than through information transmission alone. Similar interpretations can be found in studies examining citizenship learning as a process of democratic consciousness formation (Tunggal, 2023).

Another recurring theme involved the relationship between political awareness and emotional responses to political developments. Several students reported experiencing concern, frustration, or disappointment when observing public controversies and governance failures. These emotional reactions did not necessarily discourage participation but often stimulated deeper reflection regarding democratic responsibilities. Recent scholarship suggests that political concern and even political anxiety can function as catalysts for civic engagement when accompanied by adequate civic understanding (Diantanti & Jaro'ah, 2025).

Interview narratives also revealed a noticeable shift in students' willingness to express political opinions responsibly. Participants emphasized that awareness was not interpreted as unrestricted political expression but as the capacity to communicate perspectives while respecting democratic norms and differing viewpoints. The cultivation of respectful dialogue reduced tendencies toward antagonistic interactions and ideological rigidity. Such findings support broader arguments that political awareness is closely connected to democratic character formation and civic disposition development (Putra et al., 2024).

The evidence further indicated that political awareness was strengthened through the integration of critical reflection and civic identity formation. Students increasingly recognized themselves as actors capable of contributing to democratic processes rather than passive observers of political events. Awareness was manifested through heightened attention to public affairs, stronger commitment to democratic values, and greater responsibility in consuming political information. This pattern reflects contemporary perspectives that regard political awareness as a foundational component of democratic citizenship and civic competence development (Ramadhan et al., 2026).

The findings collectively suggest that Citizenship Education at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta facilitates political awareness through reflective learning, democratic dialogue, critical media engagement, and value-based civic education. Political awareness emerged as an internalized understanding of civic responsibility that influenced how students interpreted public issues and their role within democratic society. Participants demonstrated increased capacity to connect political developments with broader questions of justice, accountability, and collective welfare. Such awareness represents a crucial dimension of democratic citizenship in contemporary societies characterized by informational abundance and political complexity (Nurmansyah et al., 2026).

The Role of Citizenship Education in Encouraging Students' Political Participation at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta

The findings revealed that Citizenship Education contributed to the strengthening of students' political participation by expanding their understanding of democratic engagement beyond electoral activities. Participants frequently described participation as a continuous civic responsibility involving dialogue, advocacy, organizational involvement, and community engagement. Interview data indicated that students increasingly viewed political participation as a practical expression of citizenship rather than an occasional obligation restricted to election periods. Similar conclusions have been reported in studies highlighting the contribution of Citizenship Education to student political engagement in Indonesia (Zebua et al., 2025).

Analysis of participant narratives showed that involvement in student organizations represented one of the most significant channels through which political participation was practiced. Students explained that organizational activities exposed them to leadership processes, collective decision-

making, representation mechanisms, and policy discussions. These experiences allowed democratic principles learned in the classroom to be translated into practical civic behavior. Research concerning student political engagement has similarly emphasized organizational participation as an important arena for democratic learning (Riski, 2025).

Observational findings suggested that classroom learning encouraged students to become more confident in expressing aspirations and participating in institutional decision-making processes. Participants reported greater willingness to contribute opinions during student forums, public discussions, and academic deliberations. The development of participatory confidence appeared closely related to increased political understanding and civic efficacy. Previous studies have identified civic knowledge as an important predictor of political participation among young citizens (Akbar et al., 2026).

Interview data further demonstrated that students increasingly engaged with political issues through digital platforms. Many participants actively followed governmental policies, public debates, and electoral developments through social media while simultaneously contributing their own perspectives in online discussions. Their engagement was generally characterized by greater caution regarding information accuracy and source credibility. This pattern reflects contemporary forms of political participation shaped by digital communication environments (Rahmadani et al., 2025).

Another notable finding concerned the relationship between political literacy and participatory behavior. Students who demonstrated stronger analytical abilities and higher levels of political awareness were generally more inclined to participate in civic discussions and public affairs. Participants frequently emphasized that understanding political issues reduced uncertainty and increased their willingness to engage. Similar evidence has been documented in studies examining the positive association between political literacy and political participation (Pratama et al., 2022). To summarize the dominant forms of political participation identified during the study, the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Forms of Student Political Participation Identified in the Study

Form of Participation	Empirical Manifestation	Level of Occurrence
Student Involvement	Organizational Participation in student associations and committees	High
Political Discussions	Engagement in civic and political debates	High
Digital Civic Participation	Interaction with political content through social media	High
Electoral Participation	Participation in campus and public elections	Moderate
Community Civic Activities	Involvement in social and public service programs	Moderate

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that organizational involvement, political discussions, and digital participation constituted the most frequently observed forms of engagement. Students commonly perceived these activities as interconnected components of democratic citizenship rather than separate forms of participation. The findings suggest that contemporary political participation among university students increasingly combines traditional civic engagement with digitally mediated interaction. Comparable developments have been identified in research focusing on political participation among younger generations in democratic contexts (Rahmadani et al., 2025).

The findings also revealed that participation was influenced by students' perceptions of political relevance and social responsibility. Participants who regarded public issues as directly affecting societal welfare demonstrated greater motivation to become involved in civic activities. Political participation was often described as an extension of concern for social justice, accountability, and community development. Similar patterns have been reported in studies examining civic engagement within local democratic environments (Nurgiansah, 2021).

Several participants highlighted the importance of democratic classroom experiences in shaping participatory dispositions. Opportunities to discuss controversial issues, evaluate public policies, and articulate reasoned arguments appeared to strengthen confidence in public engagement. Students noted that these experiences reduced apprehension regarding political involvement and increased their readiness to contribute to collective decision-making processes. Research on political education has emphasized that participatory learning environments can strengthen democratic efficacy among students (Zebua et al., 2025).

The analysis additionally indicated that participation was not solely motivated by political interests but also by ethical commitments associated with citizenship values. Students frequently connected participation with responsibilities related to public welfare, social cohesion, and democratic accountability. Such interpretations reflect a broader understanding of citizenship in which participation serves both political and social functions. This perspective resonates with contemporary civic education scholarship emphasizing participation as an expression of responsible democratic citizenship (Nurgiansah, 2021).

The findings collectively indicate that Citizenship Education at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta contributes to political participation through the development of civic knowledge, political awareness, democratic efficacy, and participatory skills. Students demonstrated increased engagement in organizational activities, civic discussions, digital political interaction, and community-oriented initiatives. Participation emerged as a multidimensional practice shaped by both cognitive understanding and normative commitment to democratic values. These findings reinforce the argument that Citizenship Education remains a strategic mechanism for cultivating active and responsible citizens within contemporary democratic societies (Akbar et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

Citizenship Education at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta plays a substantial role in strengthening students' civic competence through the interconnected development of political literacy, political awareness, and political participation. The findings reveal that the learning process enhances students' capacity to understand political institutions, critically evaluate information, and interpret public issues through democratic and constitutional perspectives. Educational experiences characterized by reflective dialogue, contextual learning, and active engagement encourage the internalization of civic values, resulting in greater awareness of rights, responsibilities, and the broader implications of public policies. This strengthened awareness is translated into participatory behaviors manifested through organizational involvement, civic discussions, digital engagement, and community-oriented activities. The study confirms that Citizenship Education functions not merely as a vehicle for transmitting civic knowledge but as a transformative educational process that cultivates informed judgment, democratic responsibility, and active citizenship, thereby contributing to the preparation of young citizens capable of responding constructively to the challenges of contemporary democratic society.

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