

The Role of Civic Education in Developing Students' Critical Thinking on Social Issues: A Qualitative Study in Junior High Schools in Lampung

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ABSTRACT

Civics Education (PKn) plays a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills, particularly in addressing emerging social issues. This study aims to analyze the role of Civics in fostering students' critical thinking skills regarding social issues. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature review (library research) method through the examination of relevant books and scientific journal articles. The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that CSE instruction can develop students' critical thinking skills through contextual learning that addresses social issues, such as misinformation, intolerance, bullying, and social inequality. Furthermore, the implementation of active learning models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project Citizen, and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has proven effective in enhancing students' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems rationally. Therefore, Civic Education instruction must be designed to be more active and student-centered to ensure the optimal development of critical thinking skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Civics Education (PKn) is a subject that plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, knowledge, and civic skills. It serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge about the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and the state system, but also as a vehicle for developing intelligent, responsible, and democratic citizens. In the context of 21st-century life, characterized by the rapid development of information technology, students are faced with various complex social challenges, such as the spread of hoaxes, intolerance, bullying, social inequality, and low community participation in democratic life. This condition demands critical thinking skills so that students are able to understand, analyze, and respond to various social issues rationally and responsibly.

Critical thinking is one of the essential skills in 21st-century education, included in the 4Cs concept (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration). This skill is a competency that must be developed to prepare students to face various global challenges in the era of technological and information development. According to Nurhayati, Pramono, and Farida, the 4Cs are the abilities students need to meet the challenges of the 21st century, with critical thinking as one of the main competencies that plays a role in analyzing information, solving problems, and making appropriate decisions.(Nurhayati et al., 2024)Therefore, critical thinking skills need to be developed through a learning process that encourages students to actively identify problems, evaluate information, and provide solutions based on evidence and logical reasoning.

Theoretically, Civic Education (PKn) can be studied through the concept of civic education, which emphasizes the development of three main aspects: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic disposition. In this context, Civic Education learning not only aims to improve students' civic knowledge but also to develop critical thinking skills, active participation, and responsibility as citizens in social, national, and state life.(Adnin et al., 2023). Critical thinking skills are included in the civic skills aspect, specifically the intellectual skills needed to understand, analyze, and resolve various social problems rationally and responsibly.

Furthermore, constructivist learning theory holds that knowledge is not simply transferred from teacher to student, but rather actively constructed by students through meaningful learning experiences. Learning is more effective when students are directly involved in the process of thinking, discussing, and solving problems related to real life. Research on the application of Inquiry-Based Learning in Civics education shows that student involvement in examining and solving social problems can improve critical thinking skills because students are encouraged to connect learning concepts with real-life situations.(Kurniawati et al., 2023)Therefore, effective civics learning must be able to create learning situations that enable students to analyze various social issues critically and reflectively.

However, the reality on the ground shows that Civics learning is still dominated by conventional, teacher-centered approaches. In practice, students mostly passively receive information without being given adequate space to develop critical thinking skills. This situation results in Civics learning not fully developing students' analytical skills in addressing various social issues emerging in society. Yet, various studies have shown that problem-based and contextual learning can significantly improve critical thinking skills.

Several recent studies have shown that the use of active learning models, such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Project Citizenship, and Project-Based Learning (PjBL), can improve students' critical thinking skills. Pamungkas and Wantoro found that implementing Problem-Based Learning in Civics (PPKn) learning can improve students' critical thinking skills because students are actively involved in the process of analyzing, discussing, and solving problems related to real life.(Pamungkas & Wantoro, 2024). Furthermore, Tirtoni and Hidayati stated that the Project Citizen model can improve students' critical thinking skills because it provides opportunities for students to identify social problems, gather information, and collaboratively develop alternative solutions. Learning that actively engages students in the investigation and problem-solving process has been proven to develop higher-order thinking skills, which are essential in the 21st century.(Hidayati & Tirtoni, 2024).

In today's digital era, technology integration in learning is also a crucial factor in improving students' critical thinking skills. Technology enables students to access information from various sources, compare data, and evaluate the accuracy of information more critically and objectively. Siboro and Jamaludin stated that the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) approach in Civics learning can improve critical thinking skills because it integrates technology, pedagogy, and content in a balanced manner throughout the learning process. However, the use of technology in Civics learning in various schools is still not optimal, resulting in the potential for developing students' critical thinking skills not being fully achieved. (Siboro & Jamaludin, 2024).

Based on this description, it can be seen that there is a gap between ideal expectations and the practice of Civics learning in the field. Ideally, Civics is expected to develop students' critical thinking skills through active, contextual, problem-based learning, and the effective use of technology. However, in practice, learning still tends to be one-way and does not provide enough space for students to develop their critical thinking skills optimally. Therefore, further study is needed regarding the role of Civics Education in developing students' critical thinking skills on social issues through more innovative learning approaches relevant to the needs of 21st-century education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a literature study method (library research). This method was used to examine the role of Civic Education in developing students' critical thinking skills on social issues at the junior high school level through the analysis of various scientific sources without collecting field data. The literature study was conducted systematically by identifying, selecting, and analyzing various relevant sources, thus approaching the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. (Fadli, 2021).

The research data is sourced from secondary sources, including books and scientific journal articles. The literature used focuses on books published between 2019 and 2026 and scientific journals published between 2021 and 2026 to reflect the latest developments in educational studies.

Data collection was conducted through searching, reading, and selecting relevant literature sources. The data were then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process was based on the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which emphasizes interactive and systematic qualitative data analysis. (Miles et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Civic Education in the Development of Critical Thinking

The results of the literature review indicate that Civics Education (PKn) has a very significant role in developing students' critical thinking skills at the junior high school level. PKn is not only understood as a subject that focuses on mastering basic civic concepts such as Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the government system, and the rights and obligations of citizens, but also as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills that include the ability to analyze, evaluate, interpret, and make decisions regarding various social phenomena. In the context of 21st-century education, critical thinking skills are one of the important competencies that students must have to face increasingly complex social challenges. Kollo and Suciptaningsih (2024) stated that critical thinking skills need to be developed through learning that encourages students to analyze information, solve problems, and make decisions rationally based on existing facts.

In line with this, Civics Education plays a strategic role in shaping active, responsible citizens who are able to critically address various social issues. Through Civics learning, students not only learn the concepts of citizenship but are also trained to understand social issues developing in society, evaluate various perspectives, and formulate solutions in accordance with democratic values and Pancasila. Naibaho, Nainggolan, Hutapea, Tobing, Bangun, and Rachman explained that Civics

learning plays a crucial role in improving students' information literacy and critical thinking skills, especially in facing the challenges of disinformation and the spread of hoaxes in the digital era. (Naibaho et al., 2024). Thus, Civics has a strategic position in shaping students who are reflective, rational, and able to make decisions based on logical considerations in social, national, and state life.

Social Issues as a Context for Civics Learning

Literature reviews show that students' critical thinking skills will develop optimally if Civics learning is linked to current social issues relevant to their daily lives. Issues such as hoaxes, intolerance, bullying, social inequality, poverty, and low public participation in democracy are examples of social problems that can be used as learning contexts. Through these issues, students not only receive theoretical material but also learn to identify problems, understand their causes, analyze their impacts, and formulate solutions logically and systematically.

Kusnadi, Supriyadi, Aimulloh, Alam, Daemawane, stated that the integration of social media literacy projects in PPKn learning is able to improve students' critical thinking skills because students are trained to evaluate information, identify hoaxes, and analyze various social phenomena that develop in the digital environment. (Kusnadi et al., 2026). In addition, Naibaho, Nainggolan, Hutapea, Tobing, Bangun, Rachman explained that Civics Education plays a crucial role in improving students' information literacy and critical thinking skills in dealing with disinformation and the spread of hoaxes in the social media era. (Naibaho et al., 2024) Thus, social issues function as an effective medium to bridge learning theory with the reality of students' social lives.

The Influence of Learning Models on Students' Critical Thinking

The results of the literature review indicate that learning models play a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills. Teacher-centered learning tends to result in students primarily receiving information rather than actively participating in the learning process. Consequently, students lack the opportunity to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems independently, thus under-developing critical thinking skills.

In contrast, student-centered learning models provide greater opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process. Through discussion, problem-solving, and group collaboration, students can develop better critical thinking skills. Limbong, Anderson, and Kabatiah explain that the application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Civics (PPKn) learning can improve students' critical thinking skills because they are trained to understand and solve problems related to everyday life. (Limbong et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Al Hadiq stated that the Project Citizen model can help students develop critical thinking skills through activities such as identifying social problems, seeking information, and developing alternative solutions that can be implemented in society. These findings are supported by Tirtoni and Hidayati, who explained that the implementation of Project Citizen makes students more active in analyzing various social issues and expressing opinions based on the data obtained. (Hidayati & Tirtoni, 2024).

Not only that, Juanta and Malau found that the use of Project Based Learning (PJBL) can also improve students' critical reasoning skills because students are directly involved in completing projects that require analytical skills, creativity, and problem solving. (Juanta & Malau, 2024) Therefore, the use of active and problem-based learning models is an effective way to improve students' critical thinking skills in Civics learning.

Technology Integration in Civics Learning

The literature review also shows that technology integration in civics learning makes a significant contribution to improving students' critical thinking skills. In today's digital era, students are faced with a rapid and diverse flow of information, making the ability to analyze, evaluate, and verify

information crucial. The use of technology in learning allows students to access multiple sources of information, compare data from various perspectives, and develop stronger and more objective, evidence-based arguments.

Siboro & Jamaludin stated that the TPACK approach in civics learning is able to improve students' critical thinking skills because it integrates technology, pedagogy, and learning materials in a balanced manner in the teaching and learning process. (Siboro & Jamaludin, 2024). Thus, technology not only functions as a learning tool, but also as an important medium in developing students' critical thinking skills regarding various social issues that develop in society.

The Gap between Expectations and Learning Practices

Overall, the literature review indicates that Civics plays a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills regarding social issues. However, there remains a gap between ideal expectations and practical learning. Ideally, Civics is expected to develop civic competence, encompassing knowledge, skills, and democratic attitudes. However, in practice, learning remains largely one-way and teacher-centered.

This situation results in students receiving insufficient space for critical thinking, discussion, and in-depth exploration of problems. Therefore, more active, contextual, and problem-based learning innovations are needed, such as Problem-Based Learning, Project Citizenship, and the integration of technology into learning, so that Civics education's goal of developing students' critical thinking skills can be optimally achieved and aligned with the demands of 21st-century education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review that has been conducted, it can be concluded that Civics Education (PKn) has a very important role in developing students' critical thinking skills on social issues at the junior high school level. PKn not only functions as a subject that provides an understanding of the concept of citizenship, but also as a vehicle for developing higher-order thinking skills that include analysis, evaluation, and decision-making. Students' critical thinking skills will develop more optimally if PKn learning is linked to contextual social issues and supported by the implementation of active learning models such as Problem-Based Learning, Project Citizenship, and Project-Based Learning. In addition, the integration of technology in learning also makes an important contribution in helping students access information, compare various sources, and develop more logical and data-based arguments. Thus, PKn has a strategic position in shaping students who are able to think critically about various social issues in their environment.

However, there remains a gap between ideal expectations and the practice of Civics learning in the field, where learning tends to be conventional and teacher-centered. This results in students' critical thinking skills not being optimally developed. Therefore, it is recommended that Civics teachers implement more active, innovative, and problem-based learning models to further engage students in the critical thinking process. Schools are also expected to provide support in the form of teacher training and adequate learning facilities, particularly in the use of technology. Furthermore, further research is recommended to conduct field (empirical) studies to strengthen the results of this literature review and provide a more in-depth picture of the implementation of Civics in improving students' critical thinking skills.

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