

The Meaning of the Proclamation and the Struggle to Maintain Independence in Strengthening Civic Character

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ABSTRACT

The Proclamation of Independence and the struggle to defend independence constitute historical events that hold strategic significance in the formation of Indonesian civic character. However, in the practice of Civic Education, the history of independence is often understood merely as a factual narrative, resulting in the underutilization of its civic values as a source of character education. This study aims to analyze the meaning of the Proclamation of Independence and the struggle to defend Indonesian independence in the context of strengthening civic character through Civic Education. This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research design based on historical studies and conceptual analysis. Data sources were obtained from nationally accredited SINTA journals and reputable international journals relevant to the themes of independence and Civic Education. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify civic values embedded in the historical events of the Proclamation and the struggle to maintain independence. The findings indicate that the Proclamation of Independence embodies the values of popular sovereignty, legal consciousness, and the legitimacy of national authority, while the struggle to defend independence reflects the values of nationalism, sacrifice, unity, collective responsibility, and democratic practice through the dynamics of differing strategies of struggle. The integration of these values into Civic Education learning plays a crucial role in shaping democratic, critical, and civically committed citizens who uphold national unity and state sovereignty.

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INTRODUCTION

Western colonialism in Indonesia cannot be separated from global dynamics since the 16th century, marked by changes in world trade routes and the expansion of European powers into Southeast Asia. Economic incentives, political success, and the mission of spreading religion known as gold, glory, and the gospel formed the ideological basis of Western colonialism in the archipelago. Indonesia's wealth of spices and strategic geographic location made it a target for systematic European economic and political domination (Firdaus, 2021; Amrullah & Nugroho, 2022). Recent research shows that colonialism occurred not only through military force but also through the control of local social and economic structures, which had long-term impacts on social inequality (Nurmalasyari et al., 2024; Maria Irma, 2024). These conditions shaped the collective experience of the Indonesian people as a colonized nation that lost its sovereignty, thus giving rise to an awareness to build a national identity and fight for independence.

Indonesian national consciousness gradually grew alongside increasing colonial pressure and the development of modern education in the early 20th century. The emergence of national movement organizations such as Budi Utomo, Sarekat Islam, and Indische Partij marked a shift in the pattern of struggle from regional resistance to an organized national struggle. These movements demonstrated that independence was not solely fought for through weapons, but also through political awareness, unity, and national education. Contemporary studies emphasize that the national awakening phase played a crucial role in shaping the foundation of civic values, particularly those related to unity, solidarity, and collective responsibility as a nation (Santosa, 2021; Gajah, 2024). This awareness later became social and political capital in facing global dynamics leading up to the end of World War II.

The Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, was the culmination of the Indonesian nation's long struggle, fraught with historical, political, and legal significance. The proclamation served not only as a political statement but also as a source of legal legitimacy for the establishment of a sovereign Indonesian state (Putra & Rahman, 2021; Siregar, 2022). From a Civic Education perspective, the proclamation embodies fundamental values regarding popular sovereignty, the right to self-determination, and national equality in the international order. Recent research confirms that the proclamation marked the starting point for the formation of Indonesia's national legal system and civic identity (Ardina, 2025; Prasetya, 2020). However, the proclaimed independence was not immediately recognized, forcing the Indonesian people to enter a phase of struggle to maintain their independence.

The struggle for independence was carried out through various strategies, including armed resistance, international diplomacy, and strengthening popular unity. Dutch military aggression demonstrated that independence must be maintained through significant sacrifice by all elements of the nation, while diplomacy reflected political acumen in the fight for recognition of sovereignty. Recent studies confirm that the success of maintaining independence was inseparable from the synergy between the people's struggle and national leadership that adapted to the global situation (Santosa, 2021; Suryomenggolo, 2018). Within this dynamic, radical political ideas emerged, such as Tan Malaka's "100% Independence," a critique of the strategy of diplomatic compromise. These differing views demonstrate the dynamics of political thought that enrich the Indonesian nation's democratic experience.

The values of struggle embodied in the proclamation and efforts to maintain independence have strong relevance in strengthening civic character. Civic Education plays a strategic role in instilling the values of nationalism, responsibility, moral courage, and commitment to national sovereignty (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021; Suyato & Abbas, 2022). The novelty of this research lies in its integrative study that positions physical struggle, diplomacy, and political ideas as a single value that shapes citizen character, which has often been studied separately (Santosa, 2021; Wibowo, 2022). This study aims to analyze the meaning of the Proclamation of Independence and the struggle to maintain independence in the context of strengthening civic character and explain their relevance as a foundation for Civic Education learning. Recent research confirms that the integration of historical values in Civic

Education learning can build national awareness and civic responsibility in students (Ardina, 2025; Gajah, 2024).

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research design oriented toward historical study and conceptual analysis in the context of Civic Education. This approach was chosen because the research objective does not focus on quantitative measurement of variables, but rather on interpreting the values of the nation's struggle embodied in the Proclamation of Independence and efforts to maintain Indonesian independence. Historical studies are used to trace the dynamics of the Indonesian nation's struggle from the colonial period to the post-proclamation period, while conceptual analysis is utilized to link these historical findings to the concept of civic character. Qualitative research based on relevant literature is used in Civic Education studies because it allows researchers to interpret meanings, values, and ideas in depth from various scientific sources (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Snyder, 2019). This approach provides analytical space to link historical, normative, and educational dimensions in an integrated manner, so that the analytical framework can be directed toward strengthening civic character.

The data sources for this research consist of articles from SINTA-accredited national journals and reputable international journals published in Scopus since 2021, as well as historical documents relevant to the Proclamation of Independence and the struggle to maintain Indonesian independence. Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature search, selecting sources based on topic relevance, academic credibility, and publication recency. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify civic values embodied in historical events of the nation's struggle. The analysis process was carried out through stages of data reduction, grouping themes, and interpreting meanings linked to the objectives of Civic Education. Content analysis techniques enable researchers to systematically uncover the latent meanings and normative values of historical and academic texts (Krippendorff, 2019; Santosa, 2021), thus guiding the analysis toward a conceptual synthesis relevant to strengthening civic character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of the Proclamation of Independence from the Perspective of Civic Education

The Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, holds fundamental significance in Civic Education because it marked the birth of popular sovereignty and the political and legal identity of Indonesian citizens (Ardina, 2025). The proclamation is not only understood as a historical event, but also as a collective statement of the Indonesian people to stand as an independent, sovereign nation in international relations (Fauzan & Nugraha, 2021; Gajah, 2024). From a Civics perspective, the proclamation embodies the fundamental values of the right to self-determination and the legitimacy of national power derived from the people (Ardina, 2025). Understanding this meaning plays a crucial role in building civic awareness and nationalism in students (Hidayat, 2023). These values serve as the initial foundation for the formation of citizen character, understanding independence as the result of a shared struggle. This understanding then leads students to view the proclamation as the starting point for civic responsibility.

From a legal perspective, the Proclamation of Independence served as a source of legitimacy for the birth of the national legal system and the end of colonial rule in Indonesia (Santosa, 2021). The Proclamation marked the *de facto* and *de jure* transfer of power from the colonialists to the Indonesian people, thus having direct implications for citizenship status and the relationship between the state and its citizens (Ardina, 2025). Civics Education views the proclamation as the basis for developing constitutional awareness and respect for national law (Santosa, 2021). Strengthening constitutional understanding through learning the history of the proclamation has been shown to increase law-abiding attitudes and a sense of responsibility as citizens (Ardina, 2025). In this context, the proclamation is

positioned as a normative foundation for national life, not simply a symbol of independence. This legal significance strengthens the proclamation's relevance in Civics Education.

Furthermore, the Proclamation of Independence also has a strong educational significance in shaping democratic and responsible citizenship (Wibowo, 2022). The Proclamation teaches that independence is born through collective awareness, unity, and the nation's moral courage in facing oppression (Gajah, 2024). These values align with the objectives of Civics Education, which emphasize the formation of active, critical citizens who are committed to the national interest (Wibowo, 2022). Integrating the meaning of the proclamation into Civics learning can strengthen students' national identity and civic participation (Ardina, 2025). The Proclamation serves as a reflective tool for students to understand the relationship between independence, citizen rights, and the obligation to maintain national integrity. This flow of meaning leads to a discussion of the values of the struggle to maintain independence as a logical continuation of the proclamation.

The Values of Struggle in Efforts to Maintain Independence

The struggle to maintain Indonesian independence after the Proclamation of August 17, 1945, reflected essential civic values in Civic Education, particularly nationalism, sacrifice, and the collective responsibility of citizens (Santosa, 2021). The people's resistance to Dutch military aggression demonstrated that independence was understood as a right that must be collectively safeguarded, not simply a political status that had been achieved (Gajah, 2024). The involvement of various levels of society in both physical and non-physical struggles demonstrated the growth of civic awareness oriented toward the interests of the nation (Ardina, 2025). From a Civics perspective, this condition affirms that citizens have an active role in maintaining the sovereignty and sustainability of the state. These values of struggle shape a civic character that places loyalty and national interests as primary principles. This interpretation strengthens the position of the struggle to maintain independence as a source of normative values in Civic Education.

In addition to armed resistance, diplomacy was a crucial component of the strategy for maintaining independence, reflecting the political maturity of the Indonesian nation (Prasetya, 2020). Diplomacy demonstrated that the struggle for independence also demanded statecraft, negotiation skills, and a commitment to peace without neglecting national sovereignty (Santosa, 2021). In the context of Civic Education, diplomacy embodies the values of rationality, political responsibility, and respect for international law as part of the practice of global citizenship (Wibowo, 2022). Understanding diplomacy broadens students' horizons regarding forms of struggle that are not always synonymous with violence but remain oriented toward national interests (Ardina, 2025). This value enriches the concept of citizenship as a blend of courage and wisdom in dealing with conflict. These dynamics emphasize that the struggle for independence is multidimensional.

The values of national unity and consolidation were also key elements in the struggle to maintain independence amidst internal and external pressures (Santosa, 2021). Unity enabled the Indonesian nation to withstand the divisive efforts and threats of disintegration often used by colonial powers to undermine the struggle (Gajah, 2024). In Civic Education, unity is understood as a civic attitude that places the interests of the nation above those of groups or factions (Ardina, 2025). This value is relevant for shaping the character of citizens who possess national loyalty and an awareness of the importance of togetherness in national life (Wibowo, 2022). Understanding unity as a value of struggle reinforces the awareness that independence can only be maintained through the collective responsibility of all citizens. This analytical flow opens up space for discussion of the dynamics of differing strategies and political views in the struggle to maintain independence.

Dynamics of Democratic Struggle and Education Strategy

The struggle to maintain Indonesian independence did not take place within a single strategy, but rather through the dynamics of differing political views and approaches among the nation's leaders (Santosa, 2021). The strategic differences between armed struggle and diplomacy demonstrate the

complex political decision-making process in revolutionary situations (Prasetya, 2020). In this context, the independence struggle reflects the early practices of democratic life, marked by debates over ideas and differing political stances (Wibowo, 2022). Civic Education views these dynamics as a crucial political learning process for developing citizens aware of the plurality of views (Ardina, 2025). These strategic differences demonstrate that Indonesian democracy grew from historical experiences of struggle, not spontaneously. Understanding these dynamics forms the basis for developing democratic attitudes in civic life.

Tan Malaka's idea of 100% Independence represents a radical critique of diplomatic strategies deemed potentially compromising national sovereignty (Santosa, 2021). The differences in views between Tan Malaka and the government elite demonstrate that the struggle for independence was also an arena of ideological and political contestation (Wibowo, 2022). From a Civic Education perspective, these differences reflect the importance of freedom of thought and the courage to express criticism in political life (Ardina, 2025). This dynamic demonstrates that differences of opinion do not always weaken the struggle but can actually enrich the direction and strategy of the nation. This value is relevant for instilling a critical and rational attitude in students as future citizens. This interpretation positions differences of opinion as an integral part of democratic practice.

The dynamics of struggle strategies also demonstrate the existence of a political deliberation process in determining the direction of the nation's struggle (Prasetya, 2020). Decision-making through discussion and consideration of various interests reflects the practice of substantive democracy in situations of national crisis (Santosa, 2021). In Civic Education, deliberation is understood as a crucial process in developing public policies oriented toward the common good (Ardina, 2025). Understanding the deliberative process in the history of the nation's struggle strengthens students' awareness of the importance of deliberation and dialogue in national life (Wibowo, 2022). This deliberation value is crucial for developing a culture of democracy in Indonesia. The history of the independence struggle thus provides a concrete example of democratic practices in the national context.

In the context of learning, the dynamics of the independence struggle strategy have strong relevance as a means of democratic education in Civics Education (Ardina, 2025). Students can learn that democracy does not always operate without conflict, but develops through differences of ideas and a continuous process of dialogue (Wibowo, 2022). The history of the nation's struggle teaches that differences in political views must be managed responsibly to maintain national unity (Gajah, 2024). This value is crucial for shaping the character of citizens who are tolerant, open, and able to respond to differences maturely (Santosa, 2021). Civics Education plays a strategic role in transforming these historical experiences into students' democratic attitudes and behaviors. This discussion leads to the importance of integrating the history of the struggle in strengthening civic character.

Integrating the History of Struggle in Strengthening Civic Character

The history of the proclamation and the struggle to maintain independence holds a strategic position as a source of values in strengthening civic character through Civic Education (Ardina, 2025). The history of the nation's struggle not only presents past facts but also contains relevant normative values for shaping the attitudes and behavior of citizens (Wibowo, 2022). In this context, Civic Education serves as a vehicle for transforming the values of struggle into national character, responsibility, and national commitment (Gajah, 2024). The integration of the history of the struggle into Civic Education learning enables students to understand independence as the result of a collective struggle that must be maintained sustainably (Santosa, 2021). This understanding reinforces the awareness that independence demands an active role for citizens in the life of the nation and state.

Strengthening civic character through the history of the struggle is also closely related to the formation of students' constitutional awareness. The Proclamation and the struggle to maintain independence taught the importance of respecting national law and the legitimacy of state power (Mahfud & Riyanto, 2021; Wahyuni, 2023). In Civic Education, these values are relevant for instilling an attitude of law-abidingness and responsibility for the order of national life (Wibowo, 2022). Learning

that links the history of the struggle with constitutional values encourages students to understand the relationship between rights and obligations as citizens (Gajah, 2024). This constitutional awareness is a crucial foundation in developing democratic citizens with integrity.

The integration of the history of struggle into civics also contributes to the development of reflective and critical citizenship (Wibowo, 2022). Students are encouraged not only to memorize historical events but also to reflect on the values of sacrifice, unity, and moral courage contained within them (Santosa, 2021). This approach strengthens students' ability to assess national issues rationally and responsibly (Ardina, 2025). In this context, the history of struggle serves as a contextual and meaningful character education tool (Gajah, 2024). These reflective values are essential for developing citizens with moral awareness and a commitment to the national interest.

Civics education that integrates the history of the nation's struggle also plays a role in building national identity amidst the challenges of globalization (Ardina, 2025). The values of the independence struggle underpin national identity, preventing it from being eroded by global currents that tend toward individualism (Wibowo, 2022). In this context, Civics serves as a strategic instrument for instilling a sense of belonging to the nation and state (Santosa, 2021). The history of the struggle provides moral and historical references for students in understanding their role as Indonesian citizens (Gajah, 2024). This integration emphasizes that strengthening civic character is inseparable from a deep understanding of the nation's history.

CONCLUSION

The Proclamation of Independence and the struggle to maintain it constitute the primary foundation for the formation of the Indonesian nation's civic character. The Proclamation not only marked the birth of a sovereign nation, but also embodied the values of popular sovereignty, legal awareness, and citizen responsibility in national and state life. The struggle to maintain independence through physical means, diplomacy, and national consolidation demonstrated that independence was the result of collective participation that demanded sacrifice, unity, and national commitment. The dynamics of the struggle's strategies, including differences in political views among national figures, demonstrate that the practice of Indonesian democracy grew out of a historical experience of struggle rife with dialogue, criticism, and political deliberation.

In the context of Civic Education, the history of the proclamation and the struggle to maintain independence has strategic relevance as a source of values in strengthening civic character. Integrating the history of the nation's struggle into Civic Education learning enables students to understand independence as the result of a struggle that must be safeguarded and fulfilled responsibly. The values of nationalism, unity, constitutional awareness, and democratic attitudes embodied in the history of the nation's struggle serve as an important foundation in shaping citizens with character, critical thinking, and commitment to the integrity of the nation and state. Civic Education thus plays a strategic role in transforming the historical values of the independence struggle into civic attitudes and behaviors relevant to the challenges of national life today.

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