

Strengthening Ecological Citizenship through Social and Environmental Relations: A Civic Education Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between humans, society, and the environment constitutes a fundamental basis for the formation of citizenship character. However, in the practice of Civic Education, social and environmental relations are often understood in a fragmented manner, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the role of humans as citizens. This study aims to analyze the role of humans as citizens within social and environmental relations from the perspective of Civic Education. The focus of the study includes the nature of humans as individuals and social beings, the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society, the role of citizens in relation to social and physical environments, and the relevance of ecological perspectives in strengthening Civic Education. This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research design based on conceptual analysis. Data sources consist of scholarly books, nationally accredited Indonesian journals (SINTA), and reputable international journals relevant to citizenship, social relations, and environmental issues. The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify concepts, relational patterns, and citizenship values embedded in the reviewed literature. The findings indicate that humans as citizens enact their civic roles through social interaction and their attachment to the living environment. The relationship between individuals and society shapes civic awareness characterized by social responsibility, participation, and solidarity. Furthermore, the relationship between citizens and social as well as physical environments reveals an ecological dimension of citizenship that emphasizes concern and responsibility for environmental sustainability. The ecological perspective reinforces Civic Education as a value-based education that responds to contemporary social and environmental challenges. This study concludes that integrating social and environmental relations into Civic Education plays a crucial role in fostering citizens who possess balanced social and ecological awareness.

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INTRODUCTION

Humans are not only understood as individuals with personal needs and uniqueness, but also as social beings involved in networks of interactions with others around them. Civics Education views social interaction as an essential part of communal life and the formation of active and responsible citizenship values (Mulyana, 2024). The role of this education is clearly seen when individuals participate in collective life, where values such as cooperation, tolerance, and social solidarity are taught and developed (Tarigan et al., 2025). Furthermore, an individual's ability to understand their rights and obligations as citizens is an important aspect developed through civics learning in schools (Mulyana, 2024). Social interaction in the context of citizenship encompasses not only relationships between citizens but also relationships between citizens and the broader social structure within society (Krijnen et al., 2024).

The relationship between individuals and society forms the basis for the formation of social capital that supports the active participation of citizens in democratic life (Tarigan et al., 2025). Civics Education plays a role in the formation of this social capital by instilling important social values such as justice, democracy, and collective responsibility in the context of community life (Harefa, 2025). The existence of a conducive social environment supports the process of internalizing these values through real experiences in students' daily lives (Rahmatiani, 2020). This shows that civics learning does not only convey theory but must also connect students with the real social context and behavior in their environment (Hafid & Ernawati, 2025). The reciprocal relationship between individuals and society is an important foundation in Civics Education.

In addition to social relations, humans also live in close relationship with the physical and ecological environment around them. Studies show that integrating environmental issues into civics learning can strengthen citizens' social and ecological responsibilities in a more contextual manner (Činčera et al., 2020; Artina & Amin, 2024). This suggests that civics can play a strategic role in fostering environmental awareness as part of citizens' responsibilities in communal life (Civic Education Learning Based on Environmental Issues, 2025). An approach that integrates social and ecological dimensions in civic education broadens the scope of civic understanding, making it relevant to contemporary challenges such as social change and environmental degradation. This integration supports the formation of citizens who are not only socially conscious but also environmentally conscious and sustainable.

In contemporary studies, the relationship between the social and ecological environments in Civic Education is receiving increasing attention due to its multidimensional nature and mutual influence. Social interactions that occur in schools, for example, can encourage students to understand their role as part of a community concerned with global and local issues (Deimel, 2024). Civic education and social interactions at school also contribute to developing political knowledge and trust in social institutions that support communal life (Deimel, 2024). This understanding demonstrates that civic education functions not only to shape law-abiding citizens but also citizens who are actively involved in preserving the social and ecological environment. This multifaceted approach is crucial for shaping citizens with integrity, responsive to social change, and responsible for the quality of life in their communities.

The novelty of this research lies in its explicit positioning of humans as citizens living within both social and environmental relations within the framework of Civic Education. To date, Civic Education studies have tended to focus on the normative-political aspects of citizenship, such as the rights and obligations of citizens, democracy, and the constitution, while the dimensions of social and environmental relations are often treated separately or as additional contexts. This research offers an integrative approach by linking the concepts of the individual, society, and the environment as a whole that forms the role of citizens as a whole. With this approach, citizenship is not only understood as a relationship between citizens and the state, but also as an ethical and socio-ecological relationship that demands responsibility towards fellow human beings and the environment. This perspective broadens

the scope of Civic Education studies to be more responsive to contemporary social and environmental issues.

This study aims to analyze the role of humans as citizens in social and environmental relations from the perspective of Civic Education. Specifically, this study aims to examine the nature of humans as individuals and social beings, explain the reciprocal relationship between individuals, society, and the social and physical environment, and outline an ecological perspective in understanding these relationships. In addition, this study is directed at explaining the relevance of social and environmental relations as a conceptual foundation in strengthening Civic Education. This objective is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Civic Education studies, as well as serve as a conceptual reference in civic learning that emphasizes citizens' social and ecological awareness.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research approach. This qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand the meaning, relationships, and conceptual constructions of the role of humans as citizens in social and environmental relations within Civic Education. Library studies allow researchers to conduct an in-depth examination of the ideas, theories, and scientific thinking developing in the literature on citizenship and social ecology (Zed, 2021; Harefa, 2023). This approach is relevant for use in conceptual and reflective Civic Education research. The research focuses on strengthening normative and theoretical understanding of citizenship in social and environmental contexts. The data sources for this study are secondary data obtained from articles in SINTA-accredited national journals and reputable international journals discussing Civic Education, individual-society relations, and human-environment relations. Source selection is based on criteria such as substantive relevance, novelty of the study, and the academic credibility of the journal publisher (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021; Suyato & Abbas, 2022). The literature used includes theoretical and empirical studies explaining the role of citizens in social and ecological life. These sources serve as the basis for the conceptual analysis in this study.

Data collection techniques were conducted through a systematic literature search using documentation methods for relevant written sources. Searches were conducted through national and international journal databases to identify articles relevant to the research focus. Each document obtained was then recorded, classified, and grouped based on study themes, such as individuals and society, citizenship, and environmental and ecological perspectives (Nuraeni, 2022; Rahmatiani, 2021). This documentation technique enabled researchers to organize data in a structured manner, facilitating further analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. This analysis aimed to identify conceptual patterns, meaning relationships, and citizenship values contained in the analyzed literature. The analysis stages included data reduction, narrative presentation, and interpretive conclusions based on the research focus (Suyato & Abbas, 2022; Harefa, 2023). Content analysis was used to ensure that data interpretation was systematic and based on strong conceptual evidence.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, comparing views and findings from various literature with different backgrounds and perspectives. This triangulation aims to gain a comprehensive understanding and avoid biased interpretations in conceptual studies (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021). With this strategy, the research results are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of humans as citizens in social and environmental relations within the framework of Civic Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nature of Humans as Individuals and Social Beings in Citizenship Education

Humans are essentially individuals with unique personal characteristics, as well as social beings who live in close relationships with others. As individuals, humans possess personal will, interests, and

freedom, while as social beings, humans are bound by the norms, values, and rules that apply in society. This duality places humans in a dynamic between self-interest and shared interests that continues to unfold in social life (Etzioni, 2021; Hoskins et al., 2021). From a Civic Education perspective, this condition serves as the basis for understanding humans' position as citizens who do not live separately from their society (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021). This understanding emphasizes that citizenship is not only related to legal status but also to an individual's social awareness.

As citizens, humans fulfill social roles inherent to their position in society. These roles include the responsibility to respect the rights of others, adhere to social norms, and participate in communal life. Civics Education views the relationship between individuals and society as a means of developing civic character that balances individual freedom with social interests (Biesta, 2021). Research shows that civics learning contributes to instilling the values of responsibility, tolerance, and social solidarity through an understanding of the individual's role in society (Suyato & Abbas, 2022). This relationship demonstrates that civic identity is formed through ongoing social interactions.

The nature of humans as individuals and social beings also creates citizenship dilemmas when personal interests clash with the public interest. In such situations, Civics Education plays a role in building ethical awareness so that individuals can position themselves as part of a community of citizens. Civics emphasizes the importance of balancing individual rights and social obligations in national and state life (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021). This understanding shapes citizenship attitudes that are not individualistic, but oriented toward the common good. Within this framework, the nature of humans as individuals and social beings becomes the conceptual foundation for strengthening Civics Education.

The Relationship between Individuals and Society in the Formation of Civic Awareness

The relationship between individuals and society is the primary foundation for developing civic awareness. Individuals cannot be separated from their social environment, as the values, norms, and behavioral patterns of citizens are shaped through ongoing social interactions. In the context of Civic Education, this relationship is understood as a social learning space where individuals learn to recognize their rights, obligations, and responsibilities as part of a political society (Print & Lange, 2021;). Recent studies confirm that civic awareness develops through individual involvement in social life that emphasizes cooperation, caring, and adherence to shared norms (Nuraeni, 2022; Schulz et al., 2023). This relationship positions society as an arena for the formation of civic identity.

Society acts as a social system that provides a framework of values and rules that guide individual behavior as citizens. Social norms, customs, and habits that exist within society serve as a means of internalizing civic values such as justice, solidarity, and respect for diversity. Civics Education utilizes this social structure as a contextual learning resource so that students understand citizenship not only normatively but also in the practice of everyday life. Research shows that civics learning linked to the social realities of society can increase participatory awareness and democratic attitudes in young citizens (Rahmatiani, 2021). This process demonstrates that society has an educational function in shaping civic character.

Conversely, individuals as citizens also play an active role in shaping and maintaining community life. Social participation, compliance with the law, and involvement in community activities are manifestations of individual contributions to the sustainability of the social order. Civics Education positions individuals as active subjects who not only receive values but also reproduce and develop civic values in social life. International studies confirm that citizen involvement in social and community activities contributes to strengthening social cohesion and the quality of democracy (Deimel, 2024). This reciprocal relationship demonstrates that individuals and society shape each other within the framework of citizenship.

The relationship between individuals and society in Civics Education also has implications for the formation of collective national consciousness. This awareness does not emerge instantly, but rather through a long process of socialization within the family, school, and community. Civics Education

serves as a formal vehicle for strengthening this awareness by instilling the values of nationality, unity, and social responsibility. Research shows that integrating students' social experiences into Civics learning strengthens their understanding of their roles as citizens in a pluralistic and dynamic society (Sapriya & Mulyana, 2021). In this context, the relationship between individuals and society is key to developing sustainable civic awareness.

The Role of Citizens in Relations with the Social and Physical Environment

The role of citizens in relation to their social and physical environments is a crucial part of contemporary citizenship development. The environment is understood not only as a human living space but also as a social arena where civic values, norms, and behaviors are practiced. From a Civic Education perspective, the relationship between humans and the environment reflects citizens' social responsibility in maintaining the sustainability of shared life. Recent studies indicate that environmental awareness is part of citizenship competency that must be developed through formal education (Yusuf & Hasanah, 2025). This relationship positions the environment as a crucial dimension in shaping citizen character.

The social environment plays a role in shaping individuals' civic attitudes and behaviors through interactions that occur in everyday life. The values of caring, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility develop through individual involvement in their social communities. Civics Education serves to strengthen this process by linking students' social experiences with civic values. Research shows that socially-based civics learning can increase social participation and collective awareness among young citizens (Harefa, 2023). In this case, the social environment serves as a contextual vehicle for civics learning.

In addition to the social environment, the physical environment is also closely linked to the role of citizens. Environmental damage, pollution, and exploitation of natural resources are not only ecological issues but also civic issues related to public responsibility. Civic Education positions citizens as subjects with a moral and social obligation to preserve the environment. International studies confirm that civic education integrated with environmental issues can foster ecological awareness and collective responsibility for sustainability (Suyato & Abbas, 2022). This perspective broadens the meaning of citizenship from merely political relations to socio-ecological ones.

The relationship between citizens and their social and physical environment demands a participatory and reflective attitude in addressing global challenges such as climate change and the environmental crisis. Civics Education plays a role in preparing citizens who not only understand their rights and obligations but are also able to take an active role in protecting the environment as part of national life. Research confirms that strengthening the environmental dimension in Civics encourages the development of socially and ecologically responsible citizens (Mulyana, 2024). This relationship emphasizes that the role of citizens in the environment is an integral part of sustainable citizenship development.

Ecological Perspectives in Strengthening Civic Education

The ecological perspective views the relationship between humans, society, and the environment as a dynamic, interconnected whole. Within this framework, humans are not positioned as entities standing outside of nature, but rather as part of an ecological system connected to social and cultural structures. Civics Education utilizes this perspective to broaden the understanding of citizenship from merely legal and political relations to socio-ecological relations that emphasize shared responsibility. Studies show that a social ecological approach is relevant in explaining citizen behavior related to environmental and sustainability issues (Yusuf & Hasanah, 2025). This perspective strengthens Civics as a values education contextualized to the challenges of modern life. From an ecological perspective, culture and the environment are understood as two elements that shape each other in community life. Citizens' behavioral patterns toward the environment are influenced by cultural values, social norms, and social structures that develop within society. Civics Education plays a role in internalizing the awareness that individual actions toward the environment have broad social

implications. Research shows that the integration of an ecological perspective into Civics learning encourages the formation of collective awareness about the importance of maintaining a balance between human interests and environmental sustainability (Suyato & Abbas, 2022). This relationship emphasizes that citizenship cannot be separated from the ecological context.

The ecological perspective also positions citizens as active agents in maintaining environmental sustainability through social participation and public decision-making. Civics prepares citizens to be sensitive to environmental issues and able to contribute to conservation efforts through collective action. International studies confirm that civics education emphasizing ecological citizenship contributes to strengthening citizen participation in environmental issues and sustainable development (Deimel, 2024). This approach broadens the meaning of civic participation to encompass both the social and ecological realms simultaneously. Strengthening Civics Education through an ecological perspective provides a conceptual foundation for the formation of socially and environmentally conscious citizens. Citizens are not only required to obey laws and norms but also to have a moral responsibility for the sustainability of life together. Civics Education, from this perspective, serves as a vehicle for developing civic character that is responsive to global ecological challenges. Research shows that an ecological approach in Civics can strengthen the integration of civic values, social awareness, and environmental responsibility in students (Mulyana, 2024). This perspective emphasizes the relevance of Civics Education as a future-oriented civic education.

CONCLUSION

As citizens, humans are essentially inseparable from the social relations and environment in which they live. As individuals and social beings, humans carry out their civic roles, which are manifested through interactions with society and their attachment to shared norms and values. The relationship between individuals and society shapes civic awareness, encompassing social responsibility, concern for others, and participation in communal life. In this context, Civics Education plays a strategic role in fostering an understanding that citizenship is not only related to legal status but also to citizens' social attitudes and behaviors in community life.

In addition to social relations, citizens' relationships with their social and physical environments demonstrate that citizenship also has an ecological dimension. An ecological perspective emphasizes that citizens' actions toward the environment are part of their civic responsibility, impacting the sustainability of shared life. Civics education that integrates an ecological perspective can shape citizens with a balanced social and ecological awareness. This awareness strengthens a civic character that is not only democratic and participatory but also responsible for environmental sustainability and the future of the nation.

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