



## Building Civic Character Through Value-Based Civic Education Learning at the Elementary Level

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### Abstract

Civic education at the elementary school level is crucial in shaping students' character and moral values, especially considering the challenges posed by the decline of social values in society. This article aims to examine the role of values-based civic education (PKn) in building students' civic character at the elementary school level. Using a literature review method, data was collected from relevant books, journals, and articles, and then analyzed qualitatively. The research findings indicate that value-based learning methods, such as case studies, role-playing, and reflective discussions, are effective in instilling democratic values, justice, social responsibility, and active participation in students. However, challenges in implementation include limitations in human resources and facilities at schools. Nevertheless, opportunities to strengthen values-based civic education through the Merdeka Curriculum policy, teacher training, and support from parents and the community are wide open. In conclusion, values-based civic education at the elementary school level can strengthen students' character as responsible citizens, with the support of appropriate resources and policies.

**Keywords:** *Character, Citizenship, Civic Education, Elementary School, Values.*

### PRELIMINARY

Education is a fundamental pillar in developing human resources who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess strong character and moral responsibility. In the context of national and state life, education plays a crucial role in shaping students' civic character from an early age. As stated by Tilaar, quoted in (Asrori, 2016) National education must be able to respond to the challenges of globalization by instilling national values rooted in the nation's culture. Therefore, the educational process must be designed to produce citizens who are not only skilled but also possess integrity and a commitment to the values of Pancasila.

The development of civic character has become increasingly urgent given the phenomenon of moral decline occurring in various circles, including among the younger generation. Research conducted by Rosad (2019) shows that strong character must be formed through a systematic, planned, and sustainable educational process. In the Indonesian context, Civic Education (PKn) holds a strategic position as a medium for internalizing the basic values of national life, such as tolerance, justice, responsibility, and social concern.

Civics learning in elementary schools has great potential in shaping students' civic character. This aligns with Andini et al.'s (2024) statement that Civics education not only aims to transfer civic knowledge but also fosters social attitudes and skills that support the creation of active and responsible citizens. To achieve this goal, a learning approach is needed that is not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor, one of which is a values-based learning approach.

The value-based learning approach emphasizes the importance of instilling moral and social values contextually through an active, participatory, and reflective learning process. According to Lestari & Arpanudin (2020), this approach is highly effective in elementary education, where students are in a critical period of character formation. In civics learning, values such as honesty, cooperation, empathy, and nationalism can be integrated through various active learning methods, such as discussions, case studies, and social projects.

Based on this background, this article aims to examine in-depth the role of values-based civics learning in developing students' civic character at the elementary school level. This study includes an analysis of the concept of values in learning, its application in educational practice, and the obstacles and solutions educators can address in its implementation. By understanding appropriate learning strategies, it is hoped that civics can be an effective tool in creating a young generation that is not only intelligent but also possesses a strong national character.

## METHOD

This study employed a library research method, a method conducted by reviewing and analyzing various literature sources relevant to the focus of the study (Assingkily, 2021). This library research was chosen because it aimed to explore, interpret, and synthesize various theoretical ideas and previous research findings regarding value-based Civics (PKn) learning in shaping the civic character of elementary school students.

The data sources in this study consisted of scientific books, journals, and other sources related to character education and civics learning. The data collection procedure was carried out through the identification, selection, and classification of documents based on their relevance to the topic of civics learning based on values and citizenship character. The data analysis technique in this library research used a qualitative content analysis approach, by interpreting the meaning of the text, connecting ideas, and comparing and synthesizing theories found in various sources.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Civic Character from the Perspective of Basic Education*

Civic character is a combination of moral and ethical values that reflect the identity of a good, active, and responsible citizen in social, national, and state life. In the context of education, civic character relates not only to knowledge of the state and law, but also encompasses the development of attitudes and behaviors consistent with the values of Pancasila and democratic principles.

According to Istianah et al., (2024) civic education aims to shape individuals who are committed to the values of democracy, human rights, and social equality. Civic character includes the ability to think critically, be tolerant of differences, and have awareness and active participation in socio-political life. In Indonesia, civic character is in line with the goals of national education as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 as quoted in (Wahid, 2023), namely developing the potential of students to become people who are faithful, pious, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, and become democratic and responsible citizens.

At the elementary level, civic character formation is highly strategic because it is at this stage that students experience rapid moral and social development. According to Piaget (Wahid, 2023), elementary school-aged children are in the concrete operational stage, where they begin to understand social norms and shared values through direct experience and meaningful learning. Therefore, civic character education cannot be taught simply through lectures or memorization but must be integrated through contextual and values-based learning.

### *Character Education in the Basic Curriculum*

Character education plays a fundamental role in shaping students to be not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and socially mature. At the elementary school level, character education provides students with the initial foundation for understanding basic life values, such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others. According to Kusnoto (2017), character education is essentially a process of internalizing values that must be carried out consistently and comprehensively, both through subjects and school culture.

The integration of these character values has become a primary focus in the development of the national curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum, for example, directs all subjects, including Civics (PKn), to develop five core values of national character: religiousness, nationalism, independence, integrity, and mutual cooperation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). The learning process is designed so that students not only understand the material cognitively but also are able to internalize and apply it in their daily lives.

The latest development in education policy, namely the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, further emphasizes the importance of character through the Pancasila Student Profile framework. According to research by Rohmah et al., (2023), the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile—such as critical reasoning, noble character, and mutual cooperation—form the basis for designing learning activities relevant to students' life contexts. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which is part of the Independent Curriculum, is designed to develop character practically, collaboratively, and contextually.

In the context of civics (PKn) subjects, these character values occupy a strategic place. Civics is now viewed not only as a means to understand government and legal systems, but also as a medium for honing social awareness, critical thinking skills, and skills in social life. Research by Lubis & Salminawati (2023) shows that values-based civics learning can increase students' active participation in classroom activities, strengthen social empathy, and deepen their understanding of the importance of living in diversity.

However, as Khoiri et al. (2022) noted in their book, the success of character education is largely determined by the extent to which teachers are able to translate these values into meaningful learning practices. Simply including these values in curriculum documents is not enough—what's more important is how these values are brought to life through interactive, reflective, and developmentally appropriate learning approaches.

Thus, character education in the basic curriculum, particularly through civics, is a systematic effort shaped not only by regulations but also by a creative and contextual pedagogical approach. Collaboration between teachers, the curriculum, and the school environment is key to creating a learning environment capable of instilling civic character from an early age.

### ***Value-Based Learning Approach***

Value-based learning (VBL) is an approach that emphasizes the importance of integrating moral and ethical values into the learning process. According to Asrori (2016), value-based learning aims to develop students' character by instilling values that are relevant not only to their personal lives but also to their social and community life. In the context of civic education, this approach is highly relevant, as it encourages students not only to understand political or legal theories but also to internalize the values that underlie democratic life, such as justice, freedom, and equality.

At the elementary level, values-based learning is highly appropriate because at this age, children are in a phase of cognitive development that, according to Piaget's (1964) theory, is called the concrete operational stage (Baginda, 2018). At this stage, students more easily understand abstract values if given direct experiences relevant to their lives. As stated by Baginda (2018), character education based on direct experience and reflection will be more easily understood and accepted by students. Values such as honesty, cooperation, and social responsibility are more easily instilled through activities that involve students in real-life situations.

#### ***1. Characteristics of Value-Based Learning***

Values-based learning has several characteristics that distinguish it from other learning approaches. First, it focuses on developing attitudes and behaviors, not just mastering knowledge. As Kurdi (2018) noted, values-based education prioritizes character development, with the material presented encompassing not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor aspects.

Second, this approach emphasizes contextual learning relevant to students' daily lives. This aligns with Nurjunaedah's (2014) view that values-based learning must be able to connect theory with social practices surrounding students. Third, values-based learning encourages active student participation, where they not only receive information but are also encouraged to think critically, discuss, and act based on the values they have learned.

## 2. *Learning Methods in Value-Based Learning*

Within this approach, several methods can be used to instill values in students. One method is case studies, in which students are given examples of real-life situations that require resolution based on specific values. For example, in the topic of democracy, students could be given a case study regarding the election of the student council president and asked to discuss the principles of fairness, participation, and responsibility in the election process. Research by Ridwan et al. (2023) shows that the case study method is effective in improving students' ability to think critically and consider multiple perspectives in social situations.

Role-playing is also a frequently used method in values-based learning. Through role-playing, students can assume various roles in social or political situations and directly experience the impact of their decisions. For example, in civics lessons, students can play the role of members of parliament discussing a bill. This way, they can better understand values such as responsibility, cooperation, and democracy directly. Research by Mariana (2023) also shows that role-playing can increase student engagement and help them internalize civic values.

Furthermore, reflective discussions are an equally important method. In this method, students are invited to reflect on and discuss various social issues related to civic values. These discussions can be conducted in small groups or large classes, with the teacher acting as a facilitator, guiding students to think deeply. According to research by Wulandari et al. (2024), reflective discussions are effective in fostering social awareness and empathy in students toward societal issues.

### ***The Relevance of Civic Values in the Elementary School Context***

Civics education in elementary schools plays a crucial role in shaping the foundations of children's character, which will lead them to become responsible citizens in the future. Civic values such as democracy, justice, equality, and active participation need to be emphasized early on because at elementary school age, children begin to develop an understanding of and attitudes toward the broader social world. According to Piaget (1964), at this age, children are in the concrete operational stage of development, where they begin to understand the relationship between actions and their consequences and learn about prevailing social norms (Huliyah, 2021).

As explained by PA et al. (2024), civics education, which begins at an early age, aims not only to instill knowledge about government and legal systems, but also to teach students about democratic values, human rights, and the basic principles of social life. These values are important to instill from an early age so that students can develop attitudes that support the creation of a harmonious national and state life.

#### 1. *The Urgency of Instilling Civic Values from an Early Age*

Early civic education has several important benefits. First, as explained by Andini & Marif (2024), civic-based character education can help children shape their social identity as part of a nation with a shared history, culture, and ideals. Furthermore, teaching civic values beginning in elementary school allows children to develop empathy and tolerance for differences, which are crucial in a pluralistic society.

Research by Ayumilarosa & Meireri (2024) also shows that students who receive good civic education at an early age tend to have a higher awareness of their rights and obligations as citizens, as well as more active social and political participation in the future. They also better understand the importance of maintaining harmony and peace in community life, which is highly relevant to Indonesia's multicultural conditions.

Furthermore, civics education in elementary schools plays a significant role in shaping children's social behavior. Sardila (2015) states that good character development must begin early, as values instilled in childhood will influence their future behavior. Therefore, teaching values such as justice, discipline, and responsibility is crucial from elementary school onward, as children at this age are in the character-building stage and are highly sensitive to external influences.

#### 2. *Examples of the Application of Civic Values in Elementary Schools*

At the elementary school level, the application of civic values can be achieved through various interactive and practical methods, so that students not only learn theory but also gain hands-on

experience that deepens their understanding. Some examples of this application include democracy, justice, and social responsibility, which can be used as themes in Civics (PKn) lessons.

a) Democracy: Election of Class President

One method often used to teach democratic values is through a simulated class president election. In this activity, students are given the opportunity to nominate themselves, campaign, and fairly elect a class president. This provides them with firsthand experience with democratic principles, such as the right to vote, freedom of expression, and respect for election results. Research by Apriliani et al. (2024) shows that such activities not only teach democratic election procedures but also increase students' active participation in school social activities.

b) Justice: Conflict Resolution Simulation

In learning about the value of justice, students can be invited to participate in conflict resolution simulations. For example, in the case of two students arguing over a seat in class, the other students are given the opportunity to discuss and find a fair solution for both parties. Through discussion and collaborative problem-solving, students learn to value the principle of justice in everyday life. Nur & Zamroni (2023) found that this type of case-based activity can improve students' critical thinking skills while strengthening their understanding of social justice.

c) Social Responsibility: School Environmental Cleanup Project

To instill the value of social responsibility, one method that can be used is to involve students in joint projects such as cleaning the school environment or caring for plants around the school. These activities teach students about the importance of maintaining cleanliness and their active role in preserving the environment. According to research by Baginda (2018), environmental-based programs that directly involve students can increase their sense of responsibility for the surrounding environment. These types of activities also encourage collaboration and cooperation among students, which further strengthens the value of mutual cooperation.

d) Social Participation: Class Discussion and Debate

Additionally, to teach the value of social participation, students can be invited to participate in discussions and debates on social issues, such as diversity, unity, or problems facing society. Through structured discussions, students not only learn to express their opinions, but also to listen to and respect the opinions of others, and to seek solutions together. Research by Apriliani et al. (2024) shows that classroom debate activities can strengthen students' argumentative skills and increase their awareness of broader social issues.

### ***Challenges and Opportunities for Implementing Value-Based Civic Education in Elementary Schools***

The implementation of values-based citizenship education in elementary schools faces various challenges, but also offers significant opportunities for developing a generation of young people with strong character and prepared to become responsible citizens. In discussing these challenges and opportunities, it is important to view them through the lens of education policy, real-world conditions, and existing literature.

#### ***1. Challenges in Implementing Value-Based Civic Education***

Implementing a policy is inherently challenging. Challenges are the obstacles faced by those implementing or applying the policy. Therefore, various scientific papers have noted that implementing civic character education, particularly in elementary schools, presents several challenges, including the following:

a) Limited Human Resources (Teachers)

One of the main challenges in implementing values-based civics education is teachers' limited skills and understanding of appropriate learning methods for instilling civic values. According to Ruski et al. (2025), many teachers have not been specifically trained in teaching values-based character education. Most teachers focus more on teaching academic material than on character education. This can hinder the effective implementation of values-based learning.

Furthermore, some teachers may feel less confident or prepared to manage classes involving discussions or other interactive methods, such as role-play or debate, which are essential in values-based civics learning.

b) Limited Facilities and Infrastructure

Limited facilities and resources in schools also pose a significant challenge. Many schools, especially in rural or less developed areas, lack adequate facilities to support experiential learning methods. For example, activities like election simulations or environmental cleanup projects require specific facilities, such as open spaces or teaching aids, that are not always available. Research by Saputra & Tunnafia (2024) shows that the lack of facilities to support interactive activities can reduce the effectiveness of values-based character education, as students lack real-world experiences.

c) School Culture and Conservative Attitudes

Another common challenge is a school culture that tends to be conservative or focused on academic test scores. Some schools still view character education as an add-on, rather than an integral part of daily learning. This is related to an educational paradigm that overemphasizes test scores over character development and social attitudes. Mita et al. (2025) noted that a school culture that does not support character development can hinder the internalization of civic values among students.

2. *Opportunities for Implementing Value-Based Civic Education*

Besides the challenges, implementing values-based civics in elementary schools certainly presents excellent opportunities for all parties. Various sources have cited the following opportunities for implementing values-based civics in elementary schools:

a) Character Education Policy in the Independent Curriculum

One significant opportunity to implement values-based civics education is the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka), which integrates character education into various subjects, including Civics. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student character development, emphasizing values such as honesty, cooperation, responsibility, and active participation in teaching and learning. Rosad (2019) states that this policy provides teachers with greater flexibility in implementing a values-based approach in each subject. Thus, this policy opens opportunities for schools to integrate civic values more comprehensively into students' daily lives.

b) Public and Parental Awareness of the Importance of Character Education

As awareness of the importance of character education in developing a moral and responsible generation grows, many parents and communities are supporting values-based civics education. Saputra & Tunnafia (2024) highlight that more and more parents are recognizing the importance of instilling civic values and character from an early age. Therefore, there is an opportunity for schools to involve parents in supporting this character education, both through school activities and through value reinforcement at home.

c) Developing Teacher Professionalism through Training

To address teacher skill limitations, significant opportunities exist in training programs or workshops to improve teacher competency in teaching values-based character education. This training could include classroom management techniques based on discussion, debate, or role-play, as well as ways to integrate civic values into the curriculum. Research by Rosad (2019) revealed that professional training for teachers can improve learning effectiveness, particularly in teaching civic values and character. Trained teachers will be more confident in using innovative and engaging methods for students, thus being more successful in instilling civic values.

d) Technological Advances in Interactive Learning

With technological advances, there are opportunities to leverage digital platforms and educational applications to support values-based citizenship learning. For example, through virtual simulations of general elections or environmental cleanup projects that can be conducted online. Iskandar et al. (2023) also demonstrated in their book that the use of technology in learning can

increase student engagement, particularly in topics requiring simulations or experiential learning. Schools equipped with technology can leverage this to make the learning process more engaging and interactive.

## CONCLUSION

Civic character in elementary education focuses on developing individuals committed to democratic values, human rights, and social equality. Civic education not only teaches knowledge about the state and law but also instills attitudes and behaviors that reflect the values of Pancasila and democratic principles. Civic character development is crucial at the elementary level because at this stage, children begin to develop an understanding of social norms and shared values.

Values-based character education, integrated into curricula such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, plays a crucial role in educating students not only intellectually but also emotionally and socially. Values-based learning provides a platform for internalizing important values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation through hands-on experiences, such as case studies and role-playing. Effective civics education in elementary schools must involve a contextual, creative, and experiential approach.

To optimize the implementation of values-based civics education in elementary schools, several steps need to be considered. First, improving teacher competency through training and workshops on values-based learning methods is crucial to ensure teachers can manage classes effectively and creatively. Second, providing facilities and infrastructure that support experiential learning methods is also a key factor, such as open spaces or relevant teaching aids for activities like election simulations or environmental cleanup projects. Furthermore, support from parents and the community is essential to creating an environment conducive to character education outside of school. Finally, utilizing technology in learning can be a significant opportunity to increase student engagement in civics learning, for example through virtual simulations or interactive educational platforms.

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