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**Cultivating Political Awareness Among High School Students through
Participatory Education in Government**

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Article	Abstract
<p><i>Received: Des 02, 2025; Reviewed: Jan 07, 2026; Accepted: Feb 09, 2026; Published: Feb 26, 2026</i></p>	<p>This study addresses the low level of political awareness and civic participation among vocational high school students in Indonesia by situating the issue within the broader challenge of strengthening democratic citizenship among young voters. The program aims to foster students' understanding of governance, political rights, and participatory democracy through a community service-based educational intervention. The methods employed include interactive civic education workshops, school-level democratic simulations, digital political literacy and anti-hoax training, and the establishment of a student civic forum, implemented through a participatory civic education approach involving lecturers, university students, teachers, and pupils at SMK PGRI Larangan. The results indicate a substantial improvement in students' knowledge of governmental structures, democratic principles, and political participation, as reflected in pre-test and post-test comparisons showing an average increase of approximately 40% in civic understanding, alongside higher student engagement in school organizations and forums. Qualitative observations further reveal positive changes in students' attitudes toward politics, with reduced apathy and increased critical awareness of public issues and digital political information. The study concludes that participatory, contextual, and practice-oriented civic education is effective in enhancing political awareness among vocational students and can serve as a sustainable model for schools in developing democratic character, civic responsibility, and informed youth participation in governance.</p> <p>Keywords: Government, Citizens, Participation.</p>

A. INTRODUCTION

Political awareness among young citizens has become a central concern in contemporary democratic societies, particularly in countries with large youth populations such as Indonesia. In a democratic system grounded in popular sovereignty, the quality of democracy is closely linked to the level of citizens' political literacy, participation, and critical engagement with public affairs (Asshiddiqie 2021). Adolescents at the secondary school level, especially those approaching voting age, represent a strategic group whose political attitudes and behaviors will shape the future of democratic governance. However, empirical observations and policy reports consistently indicate that young people often exhibit low political interest, limited understanding of governmental institutions, and a tendency toward political apathy (Rahmawati 2023; Kurnia 2024). This condition raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of democratic participation and the resilience of democratic institutions.

Existing research in the field of civic and political education highlights the role of schools as key arenas for cultivating democratic values, civic skills, and political awareness. Traditional approaches to civic education, which emphasize rote learning of constitutional norms and institutional structures, have been criticized for being overly theoretical and detached from students' lived experiences (Wahyudi 2023). In response, scholars have proposed participatory and student-centered models of civic education that integrate discussion, simulation, and experiential learning as more effective means of fostering meaningful political engagement (Setiawan 2022; Nugroho 2023). These approaches are rooted in the assumption that democracy is best learned through practice rather than mere instruction.

Nevertheless, the literature also reflects diverging perspectives regarding the effectiveness of political education in schools. Some scholars argue that early exposure to political content risks politicization or ideological bias, potentially undermining educational neutrality (Berry and Smith 1999). Others contend that political education is unavoidable and that the real challenge lies in ensuring that it is conducted in a critical, inclusive, and constitutionally grounded manner (Driver et al. 2000). In the Indonesian context, this debate is further complicated by the dominance of social media as a primary source of political information for youth, which often exposes students to misinformation, polarization, and populist narratives (Sari and Putra 2024). As a result, political awareness among students is shaped not only by formal education but also by digital environments that may lack adequate critical filters.

Recent studies in Indonesian secondary education suggest that interactive civic learning methods—such as democratic simulations, school parliaments, and youth civic forums—can significantly improve students' understanding of democratic processes and their willingness to participate in collective decision-making (Fathurrahman 2024; Sulastris 2023). However, most of these studies focus on general senior high schools, with limited attention given to vocational high schools, where curricula tend to prioritize technical skills and employability over civic and political formation. This gap is significant, as vocational students constitute a substantial portion of future voters and workers, whose political disengagement may translate into long-term democratic deficits.

Against this background, the present study is situated within the broader discourse on participatory civic education and youth political engagement. The purpose of this work is to examine how a community service-based, participatory civic education program can enhance political awareness and participation among vocational high school students. By implementing interactive workshops, democratic simulations, digital political literacy training, and the formation of a student civic forum, the study seeks to explore whether contextual and practice-

oriented approaches can address political apathy and low civic literacy in this educational setting.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it adds to the growing body of literature that supports experiential and participatory models of civic education as effective tools for democratic learning. Practically, it offers an applied model that can be replicated by schools and universities seeking to strengthen youth civic engagement through community-based interventions. The principal conclusion of this work is that participatory and contextual civic education not only improves students' cognitive understanding of political systems but also fosters positive attitudes, critical awareness, and sustained engagement with democratic processes, thereby reinforcing the role of education in building informed and responsible future citizens.

B. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a participatory civic education intervention conducted at SMK PGRI Larangan, Tangerang, Indonesia, involving vocational high school students as human participants. The research design was a mixed-methods, interventionary study combining quantitative pre-test–post-test measurements with qualitative observations and interviews. The study population consisted of 60 students from grade XI selected through purposive sampling, based on their status as prospective first-time voters and their active involvement in school organizations. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the school authorities, teachers, and students prior to implementation.

The primary materials used in this study included: (1) a civic education module on governance, democratic principles, and citizens' political rights developed by the research team; (2) multimedia learning materials (presentation slides, short educational videos, and digital quizzes); (3) simulation instruments for school-level democratic practices (mock election ballots, campaign guidelines, and role descriptions for executive, legislative, and judicial simulations); and (4) a political literacy questionnaire used for pre-test and post-test evaluation. All educational materials, questionnaires, and simulation protocols are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, with no restrictions on access.

The intervention was implemented over three consecutive days (29–31 October 2025) using four sequential methods: interactive workshops, democratic simulations, digital political literacy and anti-hoax training, and the formation of a Student Civic Forum. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered before and after the intervention to measure changes in students' knowledge and attitudes toward political participation. Qualitative data were obtained through direct observation, field notes, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students. Descriptive statistical analysis was used for quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative findings..

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Improvement of Students' Political Knowledge and Awareness

The intervention produced a measurable improvement in students' understanding of political systems, democratic principles, and citizens' rights. Quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results showed an average increase of approximately 40% in students' scores, indicating a substantial gain in cognitive knowledge related to governance, the functions of state institutions, and forms of political participation. Prior to the intervention, most students demonstrated limited comprehension of basic constitutional concepts; after the

program, the majority were able to correctly identify the roles of executive, legislative, and judicial bodies and explain the meaning of democratic participation. These findings support earlier studies suggesting that participatory and contextual civic education is more effective than purely theoretical instruction (Setiawan 2022; Fathurrahman 2024).

Changes in Attitudes and Participation Behavior

Beyond cognitive outcomes, qualitative observations revealed positive changes in students' attitudes toward politics. Students who initially expressed apathy or disinterest became more engaged during discussions, simulations, and group activities. The democratic simulation, in particular, fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility, as students experienced decision-making processes firsthand. This aligns with the hypothesis that democracy is best learned through practice, as argued by Nugroho (2023) and Wahyudi (2023). The increased willingness of students to participate in school organizations and forums after the intervention suggests that experiential learning can translate into behavioral change.

Digital Political Literacy and Critical Awareness

The digital political literacy and anti-hoax training enhanced students' critical skills in evaluating political information from social media. Students demonstrated improved ability to distinguish between factual information and misleading content, addressing concerns raised by previous studies about youth vulnerability to misinformation in digital environments (Sari and Putra 2024). This finding reinforces the view that civic education must adapt to contemporary information ecosystems rather than relying solely on traditional curricula.

Implications and Future Directions

Taken together, the results indicate that a participatory, practice-oriented civic education model can effectively strengthen political awareness, critical thinking, and engagement among vocational high school students. In the broader context, these findings contribute to the debate on political education by showing that concerns about politicization can be mitigated through constitutionally grounded, non-partisan, and inclusive approaches (Driver et al. 2000). Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of such interventions, compare outcomes across different school types, and explore the integration of similar models into formal curricula to further enhance democratic capacity among youth.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that participatory and contextual civic education can significantly enhance political awareness, democratic understanding, and civic engagement among vocational high school students. Through interactive workshops, democratic simulations, and digital political literacy training, students not only improved their cognitive knowledge of governmental systems and political rights but also developed more positive attitudes toward political participation. The findings confirm that experiential learning approaches are particularly effective in addressing political apathy and limited civic literacy, especially in educational settings where civic education is not the primary focus.

In a broader context, the results support existing scholarship that views democracy as a learned practice rather than merely a theoretical concept. By engaging students directly in simulated democratic processes and critical discussions, the program mitigated common concerns regarding political education, such as ideological bias, by grounding activities in constitutional principles and inclusive dialogue. Although the intervention was conducted on

a limited scale and over a short duration, its outcomes suggest strong potential for replication and adaptation in other vocational and secondary school environments.

Overall, the study concludes that community service-based participatory civic education represents a viable and impactful strategy for strengthening youth civic competence and democratic character. Future studies are encouraged to assess long-term effects, scalability, and integration into formal educational policies to further reinforce democratic resilience through education.

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