

Civic Deficit Among High School Students: A Qualitative Study of Constitutional Political Education in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

The shifting dynamics of global democracy have positioned civic education as a crucial pillar in shaping the civic engagement of the younger generation. This research aims to investigate the forms and causes of civic deficit among high school students in the context of constitutional political education. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design at SMA Negeri 1 Rejoso, Nganjuk, data was collected thru in-depth interviews with 4 Civics teachers and 30 students from class X, as well as document analysis of syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks. Thematic analysis techniques were used to identify patterns in learning experiences, perceptions, and practices. The findings indicate that the civic deficit is not only rooted in students' lack of interest in political issues, but is also fueled by structural conditions within the education system, including pedagogical stagnation due to administrative pressure and inadequate welfare for contract teachers. Civics education tends to be monological, normative, and lacks local contextualization, leading to political alienation among students. Teaching materials that are merely an administrative formality reinforce this alienation. A curriculum unsupported by a well-being ecosystem and fair teacher distribution fails to create deliberative space in the classroom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The shifting dynamics of global democracy have positioned civic education as a crucial pillar in shaping the civic engagement of the younger generation. Report from ("The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move," 2025) Relevant to the trend of youth political participation, it shows that political participation among Generation Z has significantly decreased in various new democracies, including in Southeast Asia (Consultative Forum of Political Organisations & Idea, 2025).

Amidst technological advancements and information openness, an irony emerges when citizens' constitutional awareness and political engagement at a young age actually weaken. Civic deficit, which is the condition where citizens have limited understanding and engagement with democratic and constitutional values, has become an increasingly crucial global issue. According to (Rahmat Angga Samudera, 2023), The low interest of students in public issues reflects a lack of internalization of constitutional political values within the formal education system.

The grand theory underlying this study is the theory of Civic Competence, which developed from the thinking of (Sarah Williamson, 2026), which divides citizens into three categories: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizens. Education that only emphasizes moral and disciplinary aspects (personally responsible) without honing critical thinking skills and collective action (justice-oriented) will worsen the civic deficit. (Dwi Wijayanti, 2021) affirming that the Indonesian education system is still trapped in a "moral education" model that is not integrated with constitutional awareness. Therefore, a pedagogical approach is needed that brings together civic education with constitutional law education.

The main problem in the Indonesian context lies in the lack of space for high school students to critically understand the structure, function, and role of the constitution in national life. (Anditya et al., 2023) noting the existence of a methodological gap between Civics education in secondary schools and legal education in universities. This distance results in learning that tends to be normative and decontextualized. In fact, as stated by (Nur cahyati, 2025), The values of Pancasila and the constitution should not only be a normative foundation, but also a moral framework for the formation of active and reflective citizens.

Local contexts like Nganjuk Regency have unique socio-political characteristics, including low levels of youth political participation and the dominance of a passive political culture. In this environment, public schools play a central role as the first formal political socialization arena for young people. (Nafisatul Maula, 2024) demonstrating how schools can play a strategic role in shaping pluralism and collective consciousness, especially in diverse societies. However, there has not been much research specifically exploring how constitutional political education is qualitatively implemented in public schools, particularly at the high school level.

Previous research has primarily used quantitative approaches or general surveys of student attitudes without delving into the pedagogical and curricular processes that influence the development of civic awareness. For example, (Yulfida Rizqi Fauzia, 2024) researching the strengthening of tolerance as part of civic disposition, but not directly linking it to constitutional political education. (I Wayan Widiana et al., 2022) It emphasizes the effectiveness of activity-based learning methods, rather than their normative constitutional dimension. Therefore, there is a gap in the study of political education that directly touches upon the implementation of constitutional values in the classroom.

The research gap is also evident in the weak elaboration of the relationship between anti-corruption education and students' constitutional awareness. (Sutrisno, 2022) highlighting the importance of anti-corruption education in promoting integrity, but not placing it within a framework of civic deficit. On the other hand, (Tumian Lian Daya Purba, 2025) affirming that Pancasila education must be designed as a constitutional strategy, not merely ideological. Therefore, a constitution-based political education approach can be an alternative offering to address the deficit in political participation and legal understanding among students.

The purpose of this study is to investigate more deeply how public high school students in Nganjuk Regency experience and understand constitutional political education. This research employs a qualitative approach to capture the complexity of the learning process, curriculum interaction, and the dynamics between teachers and students in fostering civic awareness based on constitutional

values. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the formulation of more integrative and relevant Civics learning strategies for democratic life.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to understand the phenomenon of civic deficit among high school students within the context of constitutional political education practices at Rejoso State High School 1, Nganjuk Regency in February 2026. The research focus is directed toward students' understanding of constitutional values and the strategies of PKn teachers in delivering political education material reflectively and contextually. The main informants consisted of PKn teachers and 10th-grade students who were selected through purposive sampling techniques based on their active involvement in citizenship learning activities.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation in the classroom, and analysis of learning documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks. This combination of techniques provides both broad data coverage and contextual depth regarding the practices and perceptions of political education in public school settings. To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, source triangulation techniques were used, matching data from observations, interview transcripts, and written documents from the school.

Data analysis was conducted manually using the interactive Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and iterative conclusion drawing. This approach aligns with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasizes depth, process, and context in understanding social phenomena (Prof. Dr. Sugiyono, 2022). The strength of this methodology lies in its ability to capture the dynamics of student understanding and teachers' pedagogical strategies in shaping constitutional awareness, which has not been extensively explored in previous studies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research found that the civic deficit among high school students does not arise solely in a pedagogical vacuum, but is embedded in deeper layers of educational structural inequality. One unexpected pattern that emerged was the connection between pedagogical stagnation and the well-being of contract teachers, which not only limited the space for teaching innovation but also shaped the psychological landscape of teachers as pressured educational actors. In the context of Rejoso State High School 1, the practice of constitutional political education, which should be deliberative and contextual, is reduced to a rote cognitive activity due to unseen systemic pressures. (Nick Peim, 2021) affirming that deliberative pedagogy requires safe spaces and professional autonomy that are not available in an ecosystem constrained by bureaucracy and administrative pressure.

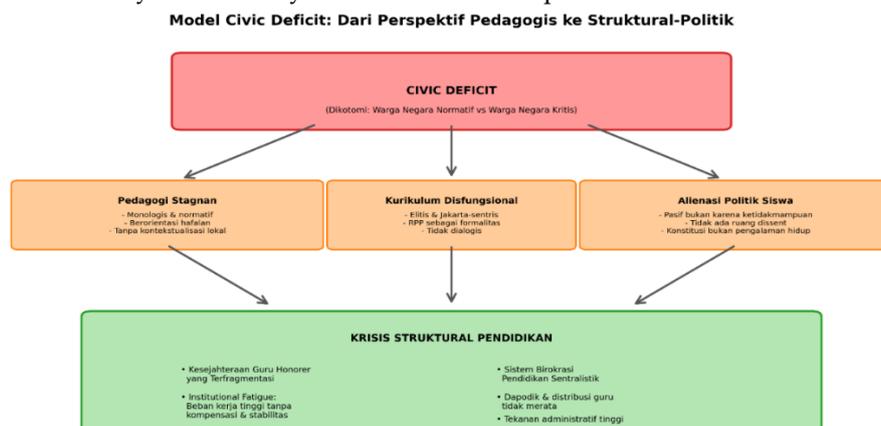


Figure 1. Citizenship Deficit Model

The fragmented welfare conditions of honorary teachers due to policy (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023) creating a dynamic of institutional fatigue where high workloads are not balanced by status stability and compensation.

Siklus Disfungsi Pedagogis dalam Pendidikan Politik Konstitusional

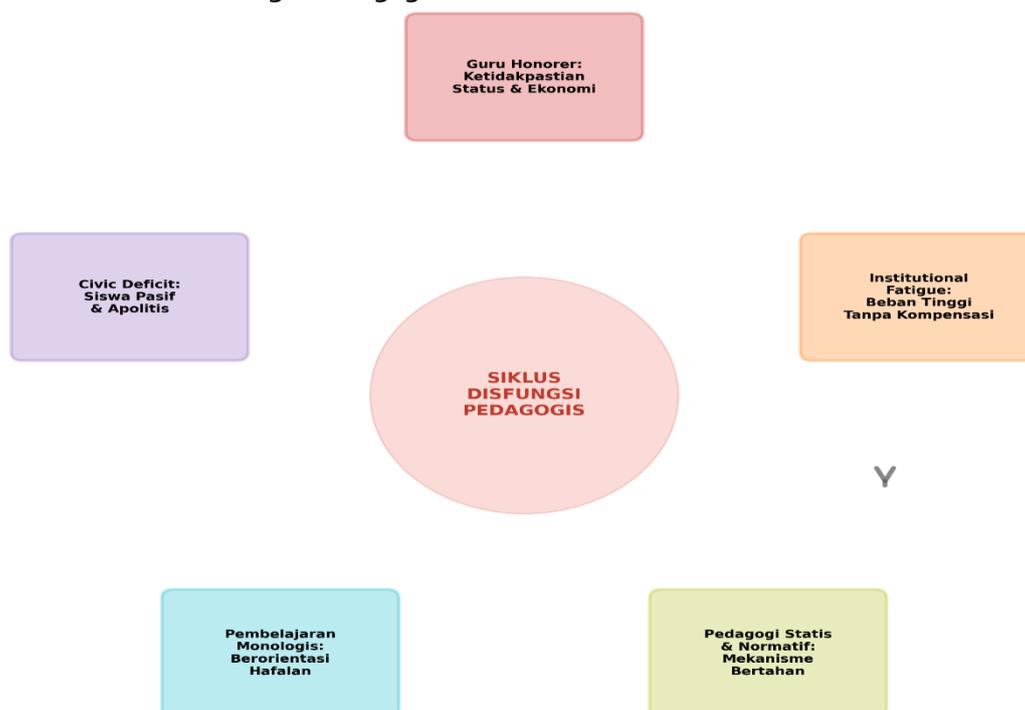


Figure 2. The Cycle of Pedagogical Dysfunction in Constitutional Political Education

With this condition, it aligns with the findings (Sarah Williamson, 2026), that static and normative pedagogy is often not due to resistance to innovation, but rather a survival mechanism against economic and administrative uncertainty. Teachers have neither the material nor the psychological space to design reflective learning, let alone conduct participatory evaluations like constitutional debates or citizenship projects. The gap between idealized pedagogy and classroom reality creates a dysfunctional and apolitical educational arena.



Figure 3. Contrast of Ideal Pedagogy vs. Reality in Constitutional Political Education.

This diagram illustrates the gap between the idealized deliberative pedagogical model (left) and the pedagogical reality constrained by structural conditions. Furthermore, the teaching materials documentation reviewed reveals a symbolic formality in the practice of citizenship education. The syllabus and lesson plans that included a scientific approach were not implemented due to time constraints and the administrative burden on teachers. Elitist and Jakarta-centric learning materials also do not provide room for students' local experiences to be articulated, especially within the context of the agrarian and communitarian life typical of Nganjuk Regency. Therefore, this condition confirms the argument (Shemaeva et al., 2026) that, citizenship education that is not intercultural and contextual will damage or worsen, leading to political identity alienation in students, because they feel that the constitutional narrative is not part of their life experiences.

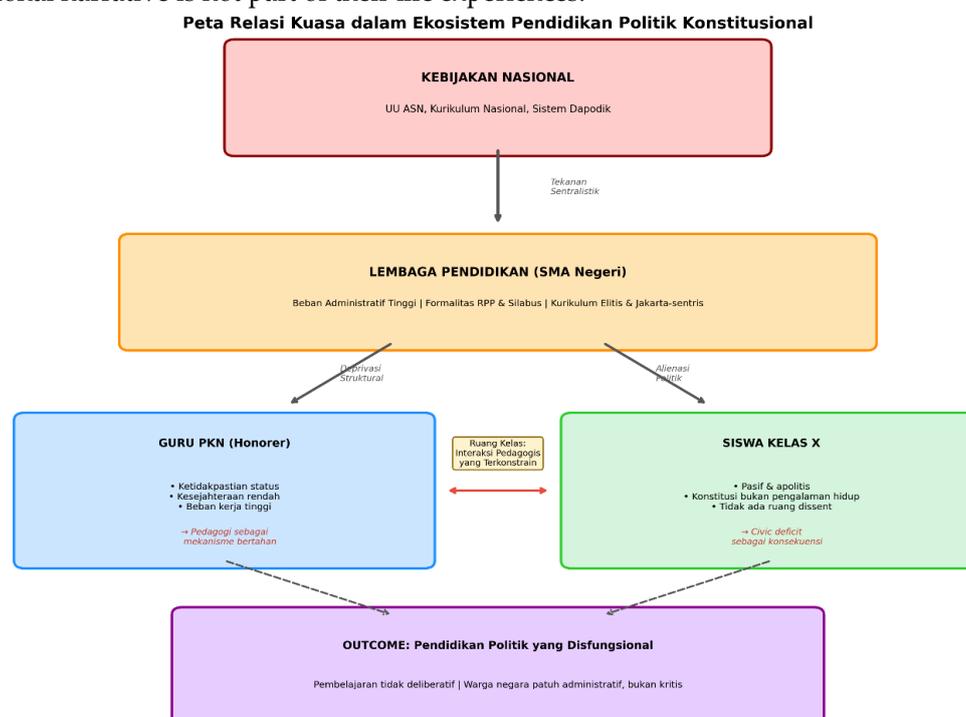


Figure 4. Power Relations Map in the Ecosystem of Constitutional Political Education.

This diagram illustrates how centralistic policies create pressure that flows from the national level to educational institutions, then to teachers and students, resulting in constrained and dysfunctional learning. This is where the civic deficit transforms not just into a deficiency in students, but into a reflection of systemic flaws, namely between normative educational policies, a non-dialogical curriculum, and teaching staff experiencing structural deprivation. (Nowell et al., 2017) reminding us that to understand complex phenomena in education, analysis cannot stop at the surface of behavior, but must delve into the power relations and sociocultural context that shape it. In this study, students become passive not because they are incapable, but because they grew up in a pedagogical ecosystem that does not allow for dissent, participation, and exploration.

However, it is important to highlight the limitations of this study. Focusing on only one school and using a qualitative interview-based approach allows for narrative bias from teachers and students who may be influenced by power dynamics or certain social expectations. On the other hand, the unique local context limits the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, within these limitations, a significance emerges that explains how the civic deficit can be traced back to the roots of the overly centralized education governance bureaucracy, which fails to accommodate the diversity of practices and needs in the regions. When the validity of Dapodik data becomes key to budget disbursement, and

when the national teacher-student ratio shows an oversupply of educators but uneven distribution, teachers in regions like Nganjuk Regency become victims of a system that is unsynchronized and unfair. (Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan, 2025).

While the curriculum speaks of forming "critical citizens," educational practices remain on the rails of authority, not deliberation. As stated by (Nick Peim, 2021), without professional freedom and institutional support, political education will only produce administratively compliant citizens, not those capable of articulating structural injustice. Thus, the answer to the main research question becomes increasingly clear that civic deficit manifests as a dichotomy or separation between citizens as a normative identity and citizens as critical political actors, and its causes cannot be reduced solely to pedagogical factors, but lie in an education system that fails to provide a just political and pedagogical infrastructure for both teachers and students.

4. CONCLUSION

This research explicitly reveals that the civic deficit among high school students, particularly in the context of constitutional political learning, can no longer be interpreted solely as a pedagogical failure of students in understanding citizenship material. Civic deficit is more accurately positioned as a manifestation of a structural crisis in education, encompassing weak curriculum design, stagnant teacher pedagogy, and welfare inequality for educators. When teachers work in the shadow of employment status uncertainty, high administrative burdens, and time pressure without adequate systemic support, then deliberative educational practices that bring democracy to life in the classroom become impossible. In this kind of landscape, students are not losing interest in politics, but rather were never given the space and conditions that would allow them to develop political awareness from an early age.

The main implication of this finding demands a paradigm shift, namely that constitutional political education can no longer be solely reliant on curriculum reform. He demanded broader and more layered reforms of the education ecosystem, starting with the validity and speed of the school data collection system (Dapodik), fair distribution of teaching staff, and budgeting policies that no longer treat teachers as a flexible variable. In a practical context, these findings are useful for education policymakers to not only revise students' competency achievement indicators in Civics, but also to review the structural design of teacher welfare, which has been neglected until now. Academically, this research expands the theoretical horizons of citizenship education from a pedagogical framework to the structural-political dimension that influences educational agents. Meanwhile, for practitioners in schools, these results serve as a call to build more dialogical, reflective, and contextual learning spaces, even under limited conditions. Thus, this research contributes to the development of understanding that civic deficit is a result of the overlap of normative policies with dysfunctional bureaucratic practices. In the future, improving political education in Indonesia can only be achieved if the role of teachers is no longer seen as curriculum technicians, but as architects of democracy who are structurally supported and institutionally valued.

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