

Contextualizing Civic Education through the Integration of North Sumatran Local Culture to Foster Citizenship Identity

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Abstract. One of the main challenges in today's society is the low level of understanding and appreciation among the younger generation toward cultural heritage. In fact, Indonesia's ethnic diversity particularly in North Sumatra, which is home to eight major ethnic groups, holds great potential in shaping citizenship identity. This study aims to integrate elements of North Sumatran local culture into Civic Education as a means to strengthen citizenship identity. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method, with data collected from relevant scientific journals, books, and articles. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings reveal that incorporating local culture of North Sumatra into Civic Education is an effective strategy to foster students' citizenship identity. Cultures from various ethnic groups such as Malay, Batak Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, Pakpak, Angkola, and Nias are embedded into the learning materials, which are grounded in Pancasila values. This approach not only enhances students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, but also encourages the internalization of moral values, unity, and democracy. Through this program, the younger generation is shaped into Pancasila-oriented individuals who are ready to act as unifying agents within a multicultural society.

Keywords: Local Culture, Civic Education, North Sumatra.

1 Introduction

Indonesia is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and ethnic diversity. Each region possesses unique cultural expressions, values, and local wisdom that not only serve the identity of the local community but also function as a unifying force within the framework of the Unitary State

of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). One province that embodies such cultural wealth is North Sumatra. This province is home to eight major ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Batak Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, Pakpak, Angkola, and Nias. The cultural diversity of these ethnic groups not only enriches social life but also provides a source of values that can serve as the foundation for fostering citizenship identity among the younger generation.

North Sumatra represents a multi-ethnic region inhabited by eight major groups—Batak Toba, Mandailing, Nias, Malay, Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, and Angkola—each with its own distinctive cultural identity, language, and customary traditions. Every ethnic group upholds unique traditions that characterize their heritage, such as *Merga Silima* and *Guru Sibaso* among the Karo, *Dalihan Na Tolu* among the Batak Toba, *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu* among the Simalungun, local wisdom of the Pakpak, *Gordang Sambilan* among the Mandailing and Angkola, Islamic maritime heritage of the coastal Malays, as well as *Fahombo* and megalithic traditions among the Nias. This diversity reflects a cultural richness that must be preserved amid the accelerating currents of digitalization [1]–[6].

However, the rapid pace of globalization poses serious challenges to the preservation of local cultural values. The younger generation, who should serve as the heirs and guardians of cultural heritage, increasingly exhibit declining levels of understanding and appreciation of their own cultural identity. This condition has implications for the weakening of national consciousness, the erosion of moral values, and the diminishing sense of responsibility as citizens grounded in Pancasila values. Globalization brings ambivalent effects: on the one hand, it broadens access to culture and information, but on the other hand, it fosters cultural homogenization that undermines local identity [7]–[9]. If left unaddressed, this phenomenon may weaken national cohesion and increase the potential for social disintegration in a multicultural society.

In the educational context, particularly in Civic Education, this issue represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Civic Education is a strategic subject designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens. Nevertheless, in practice, Civic Education is often perceived as monotonous, normative, and detached from students' everyday realities. Consequently, it has not yet fully functioned as an effective medium for fostering citizenship identity that is contextual and relevant to the dynamics of Indonesia's multicultural society.

The integration of local culture into Civic Education is considered an essential step in strengthening character education rooted in local wisdom. [10], asserts that Character Education Based on Local Wisdom serves as a strategic model for reinforcing national identity, as local wisdom embodies moral values that shape students' spiritual attitudes, social behavior, and practical skills. In line with this, [11] emphasizes that the integration of local cultural values in Civic Education not only functions as a means of transferring knowledge but also fosters students' personalities to become virtuous, patriotic, and culturally grounded individuals.

Further research also highlights the urgency of integrating local wisdom. [12] found that Civic Education learning based on local wisdom through the discovery learning method is effective in instilling the values of diversity, where students learn to respect differences by practicing local traditions such as village deliberation, mutual cooperation, and traditional etiquette. Similarly, [13] stresses that the cultural values of the Sasak community function not only as cultural identity but also as a normative foundation for shaping civic character. Through an

ethnographic approach, it was revealed that religious, social, political, and aesthetic values can serve as pedagogical resources in Civic Education.

A similar perspective is expressed by [14], who emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in linking local wisdom values, such as customs and traditional games, with the concept of citizenship. This strategy has been shown to strengthen students' identity as responsible citizens. Furthermore, [15] in his research at the elementary school level, demonstrated that teachers have made efforts to incorporate local cultural knowledge into various subjects, including Civic Education, thereby enabling students to recognize and internalize cultural values from an early age.

Accordingly, the integration of local wisdom into Civic Education serves as a constructive response to the challenges of globalization, which pose the risk of eroding the cultural identity of younger generations. Culturally based education not only reinforces national character and identity but also equips students with the ability to adapt to global influences without losing their sense of self. Moreover, the internalization of local cultural values within Civic Education aligns with the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which serves as the foundation of Indonesia's plural yet unified nationhood [16].

Based on this discussion, the integration of North Sumatran local culture into Civic Education is regarded as a strategic step in strengthening the civic identity of the younger generation. This study seeks to address the urgent need for innovation in Civic Education that is more contextual, relevant, and applicable, while simultaneously positioning education as a medium for cultural preservation and character formation rooted in the values of Pancasila.

2 Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research method, specifically through a literature review approach [17]. The process includes reading, summarizing, and organizing relevant literature sources connected to the research theme [18]. Such a review is essential for reinforcing the theoretical basis of the study while also expanding the researcher's insight into the issues being investigated [19]. The data for this review are drawn from various credible and relevant sources, including scientific journals, books, popular articles, websites, and other references. Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, where essential information is selected and simplified; data display, where findings are systematically presented in visual forms like tables or charts; and data verification, where results are re-examined to confirm their accuracy and consistency [20].

3 Results and Discussion

North Sumatra is recognized as one of the regions with the highest levels of ethnic diversity, consisting of eight major ethnic groups: Malay, Batak Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, Pakpak, Angkola, and Nias. Each of these groups possesses traditions, values, and local wisdom that not only represent cultural identity but also embody social and moral principles relevant to the objectives of Civic Education.

The cultural practices of these eight ethnic groups serve as a medium of value-based education, transmitting norms of solidarity, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect for social order across generations. These values align closely with the dimensions of Civic Education, which emphasize the formation of knowledgeable, ethical, and actively engaged citizens. Accordingly, the integration of local culture into the learning process not only strengthens students' understanding of national identity but also affirms the role of local culture as a vital pillar in safeguarding national unity.

First, the Malay ethnic group in North Sumatra predominantly inhabits the eastern coastal areas of the province, particularly in Medan City and Deli Serdang Regency. They are also commonly referred to as the Deli Malays, while another subgroup, the Serdang Malays, resides in Serdang Bedagai Regency. The life of the Malay community in these regions is shaped not only by daily activities but also by traditions deeply embedded with social, cultural, and religious significance.

One notable tradition is the practice of communal dining, conducted face-to-face, among the Malays of Batubara [21]. This practice is not merely a culinary activity but a symbolic expression of togetherness that functions to strengthen social bonds, maintain family harmony, and instill values of solidarity. It reflects profound local wisdom in which cooperation, courtesy, and respect for others serve as the foundation of social interaction. In the context of Civic Education, this tradition can be viewed as a contextual learning medium that conveys the importance of social solidarity and collective identity as a basis for developing citizens of character.

The tradition of face-to-face dining is also closely intertwined with Islamic teachings, which have long been the primary foundation of Malay community life. Religious values such as gratitude, brotherhood, and concern for others are embodied in this practice, simultaneously reinforcing religiosity within social life. Thus, Malay traditions integrate social and spiritual ethics that align with the objectives of Civic Education, namely, to foster citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also endowed with integrity, morality, and social responsibility.

Second, the Karo community possesses a distinctive social system deeply embedded with civic values. The Merga Silima structure—comprising Karo-karo, Ginting, Tarigan, Sembiring, and Perangin-angin—functions not only as a marker of kinship identity but also as a unifying force of solidarity within the community. Moreover, the Rakut Sitelu system, which defines the roles of *kalimbubu*, *anak beru*, and *senina*, emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships in maintaining social balance [22]. In the context of Civic Education, this social system can serve as a concrete example of democracy through deliberation, respect for social roles, and mutual cooperation—hallmarks of Indonesian culture.

Furthermore, the Karo philosophy of life, expressed in the saying “*Kata bena e me kap ketuhun*” (“truth must be upheld above all”), underscores their commitment to truth, courage, and honesty. These values represent moral integrity highly relevant to the goals of Civic Education in cultivating citizens of character. Courage in voicing opinions, honesty in fulfilling social obligations, and responsibility toward the community reflect civic virtues that can be integrated into the learning process. Thus, the Karo people not only preserve their cultural identity but also provide a source of values that strengthen students' civic ethics.

In addition, the Karo are widely recognized as hardworking, resilient, and disciplined, while at the same time upholding politeness and hospitality. These values play a significant role in nurturing respect, solidarity, and awareness of the importance of collective effort. Within the framework of Civic Education, the integration of Karo cultural values can help students understand that citizenship extends beyond formal rights and obligations to include participatory attitudes, work ethic, and adherence to social norms. Therefore, Karo culture can be regarded as a strategic reference for shaping a civic identity that is strong, inclusive, and responsive to the dynamics of Indonesia's multicultural society.

Third, the Simalungun community upholds a strong life philosophy known as *Habonaron Do Bona*, which means "truth is the ultimate foundation." This philosophy serves as a moral compass that emphasizes honesty, justice, and sincerity as the core principles of social life. These values are applied not only in personal interactions but also in economic, customary, and spiritual practices, shaping a community that highly esteems integrity [23]–[25]. In the context of Civic Education, the values of *Habonaron Do Bona* can be integrated as a foundation for developing students' civic virtues, particularly in fostering honesty, responsibility, and justice in fulfilling civic roles.

Beyond its philosophical foundation, the social structure of the Simalungun people also makes an important contribution to the understanding of civic values. The patrilineal clan system, *Sisadapur* (Sinaga, Saragih, Damanik, and Purba), teaches identity and prescribes exogamy as a form of respect for kinship [26]. Furthermore, the Tolu Sahundulan Lima Saodoran system, which designates the roles of *Suhut* (sanina), *Tondong*, and *Boru* in every traditional ceremony, highlights the importance of collective participation and social balance [27], [28]. This illustrates that participation, cooperation, and respect for social roles are democratic values embedded in local culture. Integrating these values into Civic Education enables students to understand the meaning of citizen participation in maintaining social harmony.

In addition, the Simalungun belief in *Naibata* (the divine power) underscores the deep spiritual dimension of truth and honesty [29]. These values are regarded not only as social ethics but also as moral imperatives derived from God. Thus, the philosophy of *Habonaron Do Bona* is relevant not only in the local cultural context but also in fostering a modern civic awareness rooted in integrity and social responsibility. By incorporating Simalungun cultural values into Civic Education, students are guided to recognize that Indonesian civic identity is built upon local wisdom that prioritizes honesty, justice, and social harmony as essential keys to sustaining national life.

Fourth, the Batak Toba community upholds a rich system of values and life philosophies that serve as the foundation for shaping civic identity. Three core cultural values—*hamoraon* (wealth), *hagabeon* (offspring and longevity), and *hasangapon* (honor)—represent a life orientation that emphasizes material well-being, generational continuity, and social dignity [30]–[32]. These values are not merely personal goals but are also closely tied to social solidarity, in which individual success is inseparable from the honor of one's family and community. In the context of Civic Education, Batak Toba values can be interpreted as a reflection of civic responsibility, encouraging students to understand the importance of balancing personal achievement with social obligations [33].

Moreover, the principle of *Dalihan Na Tolu* serves as the fundamental framework for maintaining social harmony within Batak Toba society. This principle teaches respect for the

hula-hula (wife givers), wisdom toward *dongan tubu* (clan relatives), and gentleness toward *boru* (wife receivers) [34]–[36]. The values embedded within this system are consistent with the principles of deliberative democracy, emphasizing dialogue, mutual respect, and reciprocal roles in sustaining communal life [37]. Traditional leadership through *Tonggo Raja*, which prioritizes collective deliberation in the governance of the *huta* (village), further illustrates a concrete practice of local democracy [38]. Integrating this principle into Civic Education allows students to learn how indigenous governance structures foster participatory and inclusive civic consciousness.

Additionally, Batak Toba philosophy is also reflected in the culture of migration (*merantau*) and attachment to both *bona pasogit* (hometown) and *bona ni rantau* (migrated land). This cultural orientation nurtures adaptability as well as responsibility to contribute to development in both one's place of origin and in new settlements, symbolized by the *cicak* (gecko) as a metaphor of adaptability among the Batak Toba people [39], [40]. Genealogical awareness through the patrilineal clan system further strengthens collective identity rooted in ancestral heritage. These values are highly relevant to Civic Education as they highlight the importance of identity attachment, adaptability to change, and commitment to community-building wherever one resides. Thus, Batak Toba culture provides a model of how local wisdom contributes to the development of a strong and sustainable civic identity.

Fifth, the Pakpak ethnic group possesses a rich tradition rooted in a long history and a philosophy of life that emphasizes the value of togetherness. Oral traditions regarding the division of eras—*Ntuara*, *Si Aji*, and *Manusia*—reflect how the Pakpak people understand their historical journey while simultaneously serving as a medium for transmitting cultural identity to younger generations. Their social life is organized into Pakpak *Silima Suak*, each with its own dialects, clans, and distinctive terminology. This structure demonstrates the presence of internal diversity that remains unified through collective values [41], [42]. In the context of Civic Education, this highlights the importance of diversity as a source of strength and illustrates how local identity can serve as the basis for learning about pluralism and national unity.

Furthermore, the life philosophy of the Pakpak community emphasizes five core principles: tolerance, social solidarity, mutual cooperation, deliberation, and adherence to customary law. These values are reflected in various social practices such as *merkua* (communal harvesting), *mergugu* (voluntary contributions), and *runggu* (deliberative forums). The consistent practice of cooperation and deliberation aligns with the principles of civic engagement, which stress active participation, solidarity, and shared responsibility. Integrating Pakpak cultural values into Civic Education can serve as a tangible example of how local wisdom supports the formation of inclusive, participatory citizens capable of collective decision-making.

In addition, the *Sulang Silima* social system, which divides individuals into five key roles—elder sibling, middle sibling, youngest sibling, *berru* (wife-receiving family), and *puang* (wife-giving family)—illustrates the flexibility and dynamism of social relations within the Pakpak community [43]. This system affirms that every individual carries distinct moral and social responsibilities according to their position and role. Such a perspective is highly relevant to the goals of Civic Education, which seeks to instill awareness that citizens hold different but complementary responsibilities in sustaining social balance. Thus, Pakpak culture is not only an expression of ethnic identity but also a vital source of civic values that reinforce national integration through local wisdom-based education.

Sixth, the Angkola community possesses a strong cultural identity. Their philosophy of life is encapsulated in the expression *Holong Dohot Domu*, which signifies affection and togetherness. This value serves as the foundation for fostering social harmony and maintaining intergroup cohesion within the community. The philosophy extends beyond family relations to broader social interactions, where solidarity, compassion, and collective unity function as guiding principles [44]. In the context of Civic Education, the philosophy of *Holong Dohot Domu* can serve as a reference for cultivating students' awareness of the importance of affection, tolerance, and togetherness in building a harmonious and just national life.

In addition, the normative structure of Angkola customary law—consisting of *patik* (moral values), *uhum* (customary law), *ugari* (deliberative regulations), and *hapantunon* (etiquette)—illustrates a comprehensive value system governing social life [45]. These four norms not only provide guidelines for individual conduct but also ensure social order and enable collective participation in customary decision-making. Such values are consistent with the objectives of Civic Education, which emphasize the significance of law, ethics, and active civic participation. The integration of Angkola customary values into Civic Education reinforces the understanding that Indonesian civic identity is deeply rooted in local traditions that place affection, togetherness, and adherence to norms as fundamental foundations for sustaining harmony in a multicultural society.

Seventh, the Mandailing community embraces a philosophy of life known as *Poda Na Lima*, which consists of five principal teachings that regulate both the physical and spiritual dimensions of human life. These teachings include: *Paias Rohamu* (purify your heart), *Paias Pamatangmu* (cleanse your body), *Paias Parabitoimu* (cleanse your clothing), *Paias Bagasmu* (cleanse your house), and *Paias Pakaranganmu* (cleanse your yard) [46]–[48]. This philosophy can be analogized with *Pancasila*, as both function as guiding principles of life, although *Poda Na Lima* originates from a particular cultural context. The values embedded within it emphasize cleanliness, purity, and honesty—both physically and morally—thereby forming a strong foundation for the development of individual and communal character.

Furthermore, *Poda Na Lima* does not merely address physical cleanliness but also encompasses moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. For instance, *Paias Rohamu* highlights the importance of purifying one's heart by avoiding destructive behaviors such as slander and hatred, while *Paias Pamatangmu* stresses the need to preserve the body by refraining from consuming forbidden food and engaging in unlawful practices. These values foster the understanding that cleanliness extends beyond physical aspects to moral integrity, which cultivates honesty, responsibility, and virtuous character. Within the framework of Civic Education, these principles may be integrated to instill in students the awareness that moral purity is essential to building a strong civic identity.

Moreover, the application of *Poda Na Lima* in daily life reflects the community's concern for the environment and social sustainability. *Paias Bagasmu* and *Paias Pakaranganmu* stress the importance of maintaining cleanliness within the household and its surroundings, not only for health reasons but also as a symbol of social responsibility toward shared living spaces. These values align with the objectives of Civic Education, which emphasize citizens' roles in environmental stewardship, social solidarity, and adherence to moral norms. By integrating the philosophy of *Poda Na Lima* into learning, students can comprehend that Indonesian civic

identity is built not only upon formal legal structures but also upon local wisdom that instills purity of heart, ethical behavior, and social responsibility.

Eighth, the Nias people possess a long history and enduring social traditions that continue to shape their cultural identity. Oral traditions in the Gomo region recount the story of six ancestral figures believed to be the descendants of a female ancestor known as *Ibu Sirici*. This genealogy was later documented by missionaries such as Sundermann and Thomas in the nineteenth century, who identified two principal lineages within Nias society. On the basis of this historical foundation, the Nias community developed a social structure rooted in a patrilineal kinship system, wherein blood relations extending up to five generations are regarded as close relatives. Such kinship ties transcend individual clans and instead emphasize inter-clan solidarity, which reinforces a sense of togetherness and mutual support, even among those living in diaspora.

Furthermore, Nias customary law, particularly those traditions originating from Gomo, emphasizes the importance of marriage, customary law, and reverence for ancestors. A central institution in this context is the *Fondrako* ceremony, during which customary laws are formulated, revised, and legitimized through sacred oaths and curses [49], [50]. These laws are binding and violations incur strict sanctions, ranging from fines to capital punishment. This tradition illustrates the high regard in which Nias society holds social norms and collective responsibility. Within the framework of Civic Education, such values are relevant for fostering awareness of the importance of legal obedience, social discipline, and respect for shared norms and authority as the foundations of national life.

In addition, the philosophy of life among the Nias people is expressed through proverbs, poetic sayings, and idioms that emphasize solidarity, honesty, and reverence for ancestors. The combination of strong kinship ties, robust customary law, and community-based governance led by traditional leaders demonstrates a well-structured system of social organization. This aligns with the objectives of Civic Education, which extend beyond cognitive aspects to encompass the cultivation of solidarity, compliance with norms, and appreciation of cultural values. Integrating Nias cultural values into civic learning can thus strengthen students' identity as citizens who are not only law-abiding but also culturally grounded, community-oriented, and respectful of diversity.

Taken together, the integration of local cultural values from the eight major ethnic groups in North Sumatra—namely the Malays, Karo, Simalungun, Batak Toba, Pakpak, Angkola, Mandailing, and Nias—into Civic Education contributes to the strengthening of civic identity. Each group possesses a distinct philosophy of life, value system, and customary structure: the communal dining tradition of the Malays, the *Rakut Sitelu* system of the Karo, the *Habonaron Do Bona* philosophy of the Simalungun, the *Dalihan Na Tolu* principle of the Batak Toba, the philosophy of solidarity among the Pakpak, the value of *Holong Dohot Domu* in Angkola, the *Poda Na Lima* teachings of the Mandailing, and the *Fondrako* customary law of the Nias. Collectively, these values encompass moral, social, religious, and ethical principles consistent with the aims of Civic Education, namely to develop citizens who are of strong character, law-abiding, appreciative of diversity, and committed to national unity.

4 Conclusion

Civic Education contextualized with local wisdom can serve as an effective strategy to bridge traditional cultural values with the challenges of modernity. The noble values of the eight ethnic groups play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity, social solidarity, respect for the law, environmental awareness, as well as honesty and moral integrity. Thus, the integration of local wisdom not only introduces cultural diversity but also nurtures students' awareness that Indonesian civic identity is rooted in a rich tradition while remaining relevant in addressing contemporary national issues.

This study offers a significant contribution to strengthening the paradigm of Civic Education grounded in local culture. The integration of values from the Malay, Karo, Simalungun, Batak Toba, Pakpak, Angkola, Mandailing, and Nias communities demonstrates that civic identity does not emerge instantaneously but is cultivated through the internalization of cultural values that are deeply embedded in society. By incorporating local wisdom into the learning process, students are encouraged not only to understand formal norms and legal systems but also to embody the philosophical principles of life inherited from the nation's ancestors. Accordingly, Civic Education rooted in local wisdom can serve as a strategic instrument in shaping citizens who embody integrity, inclusivity, competitiveness, and a strong sense of national consciousness in the midst of globalization.

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