

Citizenship Education in Primary Schools: How Citizenship Conceptions Shape Learning Aims and Classroom Practices

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Abstract

Citizenship education is foundational to primary school, where young learners begin developing civic identity, values, and participation skills. This paper explores how different conceptions of citizenship influence the aims, curriculum content, and teaching methods in primary school civic education. Using a narrative literature review of peer-reviewed studies published between 2017 and 2024, the analysis examines five citizenship models: liberal, republican, deliberative, global, and Pancasila-based, and their pedagogical implications for elementary learners aged 6 to 12 years. The findings demonstrate that each citizenship conception emphasizes distinct learning objectives. Liberal models prioritize critical thinking and understanding rights; republican frameworks promote cooperative learning and community service; deliberative approaches develop dialogue and empathy; global citizenship cultivates intercultural awareness and environmental responsibility; and Pancasila-based education integrates moral character, national identity, and democratic values through culturally grounded activities. The review reveals that primary school citizenship education functions not merely as knowledge transmission but as a formative process shaping how children understand themselves as members of their communities, nations, and the wider world. In the Indonesian context, Pancasila provides a philosophical and ethical foundation that enables primary school teachers to connect universal civic principles with local cultural values and children's lived experiences. The paper proposes an integrative model of primary school citizenship education that synthesizes these five perspectives, demonstrating how teachers can simultaneously develop children's critical thinking, participation skills, moral reasoning, cultural identity, and global awareness through age-appropriate and contextually relevant pedagogies.

Keywords: citizenship education, primary school, Pancasila, global citizenship

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship and education are tightly interwoven domains where societal ideals about civic identity shape educational purposes and practice. In primary schools, this relationship is particularly consequential because the elementary years represent a critical formative period when children begin developing fundamental civic competencies, values, and identities that influence their later civic participation and social responsibility. Research on citizenship education in primary schools suggests that how citizenship is conceptualized by educators and curriculum designers influences not only what young learners are taught but also how schools organize curriculum and pedagogy to develop children who can contribute to their communities and society in meaningful ways. Across global research on elementary education, global citizenship education (GCE) has emerged as a major research trend in primary school contexts, reflecting an increasing scholarly interest in developing cosmopolitan and interconnected civic frameworks that extend beyond strictly national paradigms (Lionar et al., 2025).

Different theoretical perspectives on citizenship produce distinct educational emphases in primary school contexts. Liberal conceptions generally foreground individual rights and critical thinking as educational aims for young learners, which in practice means teaching children about fairness, rules, and their own agency in democratic processes. Republican and deliberative traditions, by contrast, emphasize participation, collaborative reasoning, and the civic virtues required for collective life. In primary schools, these approaches translate into cooperative learning structures, student councils, classroom discussions, and community service activities where children practice working together and considering others' perspectives. These conceptual distinctions matter considerably because they shape curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and assessment priorities in primary school citizenship education contexts (Lionar et al., 2025). A primary school teacher's conception of citizenship will influence whether citizenship lessons focus mainly on knowing about government and laws, or whether they emphasize children's active participation in classroom and community decision-making.

In the Indonesian educational context, Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) embodies a cultural and national model of citizenship that is oriented toward moral character formation, national unity, and democratic values rooted in the state's foundational philosophy. For primary school learners, PPKn is designed to develop children's understanding of national identity, respect for diversity, moral reasoning grounded in Pancasila principles, and a sense of belonging to the Indonesian nation. Studies of Pancasila-based civic education show its strong influence on how primary school curricula are structured and on shaping students' civic competencies in alignment with national goals for identity formation and social cohesion (Sunarso et al., 2024). Research on instructional models within primary school PPKn further demonstrates that integrating local values, community-based learning, and age-appropriate activities addressing real social issues can significantly strengthen children's civic awareness and engagement (Sakman et al., 2024; Damanik & Lie, 2025).

Despite these diverse developments in primary school citizenship education, there remains a need for clearer integration between the conceptual models of citizenship discussed in international scholarship and the educational practices actually implemented in primary school classrooms, including national curricula such as PPKn in Indonesia. Existing literature often focuses on either curricular descriptions or isolated instructional interventions without fully articulating how broader citizenship conceptions shape educational aims, pedagogy, and student outcomes in elementary school contexts. Furthermore, limited research addresses how primary school teachers navigate tensions between different citizenship conceptions, or how they can adaptively blend global and national (Pancasila-aligned) civic education goals in ways that are developmentally appropriate for young learners. This paper therefore investigates how multiple conceptions of citizenship influence the aims and practices of primary school education with particular attention to reconciling global and national (Pancasila-aligned) civic education goals and demonstrating their classroom applications for elementary learners.

METHOD

This study used a narrative literature review design to analyze how different conceptions of citizenship influence primary school educational purposes and practices. The narrative approach was chosen because it allows critical interpretation of philosophical ideas and empirical findings about elementary education without the rigid structure of systematic reviews.

Data were gathered from Scopus and Web of Science databases, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2017 and 2024 that examined citizenship education, civic identity, curriculum, pedagogy, teaching practices, or Pancasila-based education in primary school and elementary contexts. Search terms included citizenship education in primary schools, civic identity in elementary education, global citizenship for young learners, and Pancasila education in primary schools. Only studies that discussed conceptual frameworks or empirical evidence linking citizenship conceptions with primary school educational aims, curriculum design, or teaching methods were included (Syahrul et al., 2024).

The collected studies were reviewed to identify major themes that explain how different conceptions of citizenship shape primary school teaching and learning. The analysis focused on five categories: liberal, republican, deliberative, global, and cultural and national (Pancasila-based) citizenship models, with particular attention to how each framework translates into elementary classroom practices and age-appropriate learning activities. Findings were synthesized to reveal conceptual patterns, similarities, and contextual differences between global citizenship education approaches and Indonesian Pancasila-based approaches in primary school contexts. The analysis also compared how each citizenship model influences primary school educational aims, curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and student learning outcomes, providing a conceptual foundation for integrating national and global values in primary school civic education and informing how teachers can implement these frameworks with elementary learners (Sakman et al., 2024; Damanik et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Citizenship education in primary schools reflects a nation's moral, philosophical, and political vision of what it means to be a citizen in relation to young learners' developmental capacities and lived experiences. Across the literature, citizenship is understood as more than legal status; it encompasses identity, participation, and values that link children to their families, communities, and the wider world. Education thus becomes a medium through which these civic ideals are transmitted and reinterpreted in elementary contexts in response to globalization, digitalization, and democratic change (Schulz et al., 2018).

Global studies show that primary school education systems conceptualize citizenship differently depending on political culture and social priorities. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2016) demonstrated wide variation among countries in how primary schools integrate civic knowledge, engagement, and attitudes into learning outcomes for elementary learners (Schulz et al., 2018). These differences reflect each system's dominant conception of citizenship, including liberal, republican, deliberative, global, and cultural and national perspectives, and how these frameworks are adapted for age-appropriate teaching and learning with children aged 6 to 12 years.

The liberal conception of citizenship prioritizes autonomy, rationality, and individual rights. In primary school contexts, Fernández and Sundström (2011) identify that liberal civic education aims to cultivate critical and independent thinkers who can question authority and participate in democratic processes through reasoned judgment. This orientation aligns with civic education programs that value classroom debates, discussions about fairness and rules, and learning about children's own rights and responsibilities. In practice, liberal models shape primary school curricula that emphasize age-appropriate political knowledge, human rights

concepts suited to children's understanding, and how basic democratic institutions function. Through activities such as classroom elections, discussions about fair rules, and exploring the concept of rights, young learners develop understanding of laws and governance while practicing critical thinking. This model fosters intellectual empowerment and critical awareness in elementary contexts, skills essential for informed participation in pluralistic societies (Fernández and Sundström, 2011).

However, critiques of liberal citizenship education point out that focusing excessively on individual autonomy in primary schools risks producing civic detachment and neglecting children's need for moral guidance and sense of belonging. Without shared moral or communal reference points, elementary education can devolve into abstract reasoning divorced from civic solidarity, mutual responsibility, and the emotional dimensions of citizenship that matter to young learners (Cohen, 2010). Therefore, liberalism provides an essential cognitive foundation for primary school citizenship but requires integration with moral and participatory elements grounded in children's social experiences.

The republican conception reintroduces collective responsibility into citizenship in ways particularly suited to primary school learning. Cohen (2010) argues that republican frameworks highlight civic virtue and commitment to the common good. Education inspired by republican ideals in primary schools promotes active participation through cooperative classroom projects, community service activities, student councils, and school governance experiences where children practice collaborative decision-making. This model sees citizenship as practice rather than mere knowledge, recognizing that young learners develop civic understanding through doing. In Indonesia, republican ideals find resonance in *gotong royong*, mutual cooperation that underpins Pancasila philosophy and reflects values familiar to many children through family and community experiences. Civic education in primary schools encourages students to engage in collaborative problem-solving and shared responsibility projects, aligning with national goals of unity and social justice while being developmentally appropriate for elementary learners (Afan, 2024). Such practices strengthen children's democratic understanding by rooting participation in shared cultural ethics and lived experiences rather than abstract institutionalism.

The deliberative conception of citizenship builds on dialogue as the essence of democracy and has particular relevance for primary school pedagogy. According to Cohen (2010), deliberative pedagogy transforms classrooms into arenas for reasoning, moral inquiry, and respectful exchange of ideas. Teachers facilitate structured discussions that value children's contributions, encourage listening to different perspectives, and support consensus building. These dialogic processes cultivate empathy, perspective-taking, and tolerance, traits crucial for primary school learners in diverse societies.

Deliberative practices are increasingly applied in primary school civic education through discussion-based learning, small group conversations, and student forums adapted to elementary contexts. When implemented effectively with age-appropriate scaffolding, they improve children's civic reasoning, conflict resolution skills, and respect for difference. Yet, challenges arise in cultural and educational contexts with hierarchical classroom traditions where open dialogue and student voice are limited (Syahrul et al., 2024). Reforming pedagogical culture to support deliberative practices is thus central to advancing deliberative citizenship in primary schools, requiring teachers to create safe spaces where young learners can express ideas and learn from respectful disagreement.

The global citizenship framework extends civic responsibility beyond national borders and introduces primary school learners to interconnected global realities. It emphasizes interdependence, sustainability, and moral responsibility for global challenges appropriate to children's developmental understanding. Lionar et al. (2025) identify global citizenship education as a rapidly expanding field connecting civic education with global ethics and the Sustainable Development Goals, increasingly integrated into primary school curricula. It encourages young students to see themselves as members of a shared global community while developing awareness of how local and global issues connect.

Global citizenship education in primary schools promotes competencies such as intercultural communication, curiosity about other cultures and peoples, environmental awareness, and social empathy. Research by Anggaraini et al. (2025) demonstrates that embedding age-appropriate global themes into Pancasila education enhances children's intercultural understanding and empathy without weakening national identity or connection to local community. Through activities such as learning about children in other countries, exploring global environmental issues, and understanding cultural diversity, primary school students become aware of interconnected challenges and opportunities that link their local experiences to broader global contexts.

Despite these benefits, tensions remain between emphasizing global citizenship and maintaining children's connection to their national identity and local community. Excessive emphasis on global perspectives can marginalize local cultures and national cohesion that matter to young learners' sense of belonging. In response, Afan (2024) argues that Pancasila serves as a philosophical anchor that allows Indonesia to adapt global ideals while preserving indigenous moral and cultural identity meaningful to children. This approach positions Pancasila as both a national and universal moral compass, helping primary school teachers integrate global awareness with local and national belonging.

Within Indonesia's primary school civic education framework, Pancasila-based citizenship integrates ethical, spiritual, and democratic values in ways suited to children's developmental needs. Sunarso et al. (2024) show that Pancasila functions as a normative foundation for developing children's civic identity grounded in morality, social justice, and national understanding. The primary school curriculum emphasizes age-appropriate reflection on moral dilemmas, participation in community life, and understanding of national diversity that children can relate to their own experiences.

Pedagogical innovation within Pancasila-based primary school education continues to evolve. Sakman et al. (2024) demonstrate how the Value Clarification Technique based on local wisdom reinforces elementary students' social awareness and empathy through interactive, experiential learning. Such methods contextualize civic learning for young learners, enabling children to internalize values through culturally resonant practices and real community engagement. This synthesis ensures that primary school education remains relevant to both cultural heritage and contemporary change while being developmentally appropriate for elementary learners.

The rise of digital citizenship education introduces a new dimension to primary school civic learning, reflecting children's increasing engagement with digital technologies. Damanik and Lie (2025) highlight that digital citizenship connects civic responsibility with online engagement in age-appropriate ways, aligning primary school education with SDGs 4, 10, and

16. Digital spaces now serve as arenas where young learners encounter information, interact with peers, and express themselves, but also face challenges such as online safety, misinformation, and ethical dilemmas. Teachers play a strategic role in mediating these digital transformations and helping primary school students develop responsible digital practices. Damanik et al. (2025) emphasize that elementary educators must integrate digital literacy, ethics, and civic responsibility into their instruction in developmentally appropriate ways. When teachers act as facilitators of critical and safe digital engagement, primary school students learn to participate constructively online and understand digital citizenship as an extension of their offline civic responsibilities, fostering informed and ethical digital citizenship among young learners.

Ethical guidance is critical to this digital shift in primary school contexts, Yorman and Sadam (2025) propose that Pancasila values provide an ethical framework for children's responsible online behavior. They argue that young digital citizens should embody ketuhanan, kemanusiaan, and keadilan, the core principles of Pancasila, to maintain civility and ethical conduct in digital spaces. This approach situates digital citizenship within a moral-spiritual dimension unique to Indonesia's civic tradition and meaningful to primary school learners. Integrating digital and traditional models of citizenship creates a holistic vision for primary school civic education. It allows young learners to navigate multiple civic arenas, local, national, digital, and global, while maintaining ethical coherence and age-appropriate understanding. By blending critical thinking, civic participation, moral virtue, and digital literacy, primary school education prepares children to develop as informed, ethical citizens in democratic and networked societies (Anggaraini et al., 2025; Damanik et al., 2025).

The convergence of these citizenship conceptions underscores the need for an integrated model of primary school citizenship education. Liberal approaches ensure cognitive and analytical depth appropriate to elementary learners' developing reasoning; republican and deliberative models enhance children's participation, dialogue, and social skills; global citizenship builds empathy and environmental awareness; and Pancasila-based frameworks preserve cultural and moral grounding connected to children's communities and national identity. Combined, these strands form a balanced civic paradigm adaptable to primary school contexts and Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

This synthesis points toward a dynamic future for citizenship education in Indonesian primary schools. The integration of Pancasila philosophy, age-appropriate global awareness, and guided digital literacy can form the backbone of transformative elementary civic education. Future research should examine how this integrated citizenship model operates in primary school classroom practice through longitudinal and comparative studies. Understanding how primary school teachers, young learners, and digital environments together shape children's emerging civic identity and participation will be key to achieving education that is both globally aware and locally rooted, cognitively rigorous and emotionally meaningful for elementary learners.

CONCLUSION

This review concludes that conceptions of citizenship strongly influence primary school educational purposes, curriculum orientation, and pedagogical practices, with each model offering distinct contributions to young learners' civic development. Liberal models emphasize critical thinking and age-appropriate understanding of individual rights; republican and deliberative models promote children's participation in classroom and community decision-

making and dialogue skills; global citizenship frameworks expand young learners' civic responsibility to include awareness of international and environmental issues; and Pancasila-based education integrates moral and cultural identity with democratic values grounded in children's local contexts. Together, these perspectives highlight the need for an integrative model of primary school citizenship education that balances global competencies and awareness with local moral foundations and children's sense of belonging to their communities and nation. In Indonesia, strengthening the synthesis between global and Pancasila-based citizenship in primary school contexts can support character formation, social cohesion, and democratic engagement among elementary learners. When teachers intentionally integrate these citizenship conceptions through developmentally appropriate pedagogy, young students develop the cognitive skills, social capacities, moral reasoning, and civic dispositions needed to participate meaningfully in their communities while remaining aware of their connections to the wider world. Future research should explore how these theoretical frameworks operate in real primary school classrooms through longitudinal and mixed-method studies, examining how teacher beliefs, classroom interactions, digital learning environments, and multicultural contexts together mediate the relationship between citizenship ideals and elementary students' actual civic learning and development.

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