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Reconceptualizing Civic Education based on Pancasila Ideology to Nurture a Politically Literate Citizenry in Clientelism Contexts

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Abstract

This article examines how civic education, grounded in the Pancasila ideology, can be reconceptualized to nurture a politically literate citizenry in clientelist contexts. It departs from the observation that, despite the consolidation of formal democratic procedures, many citizens continue to experience politics primarily as transactional exchanges of votes, access, and material favors. Pancasila, as the Indonesian state ideology, provides a normative framework that emphasizes justice, humanity, and the public good, yet these principles are often undermined by entrenched clientelist networks. The study aims to clarify how civic education can respond to this tension by moving beyond normative, text-based instruction toward the cultivation of critical political literacy, ethical–political judgement, and non-clientelist forms of participation. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach informed by document analysis of civic education curricula and secondary literature on clientelism, democratic citizenship, and critical pedagogy. The analysis first maps how existing civic education discourses tend to overlook informal institutions that shape everyday political behavior. It then develops a Pancasila-based conceptual model of civic education that combines structural awareness of power relations, ethical reasoning anchored in Pancasila values, and participatory learning experiences in schools and communities. The article argues that such a model can help citizens recognize the long-term costs of clientelist exchanges, evaluate them against public-interest norms, and imagine alternative practices of political engagement. The study thus contributes to debates on democratic citizenship in the Global South and offers normative and practical implications for curriculum designers, educators, and policy makers.

Keywords: *Critical Citizenship; Democratic Competence; Patronage Network; Political Socialization*

Introduction

Across many democracies in the Global South, electoral institutions have expanded while informal practices such as clientelism, patronage, and vote buying continue to structure citizen–elite relations. Clientelism, defined as the contingent exchange of material benefits for political support—remains a resilient logic of political competition that personalises public resources and weakens programmatic

accountability (Hicken, 2011; Jensen & Justesen, 2014). In recent years, comparative work has shown how clientelist politics systematically distorts development outcomes, particularly where formal democratic rules coexist with entrenched informal institutions (Gisselquist et al., 2024; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Indonesia's experience of post-authoritarian democratization illustrates this paradox: elections are regular and competitive, yet practices of money politics and vote buying remain pervasive and can decisively shape electoral outcomes (Muhtadi, 2019).

Under such conditions, citizens risk "learning" politics primarily as a marketplace of private exchanges rather than a collective arena for debating public reason and rights. Political participation becomes increasingly transactional, while critical scrutiny of policy, ideology, and institutional performance is crowded out by short-term material incentives. Research on political literacy underscores that many citizens, including young voters, struggle to interpret political communication, distinguish credible information from disinformation, and connect everyday grievances with structural questions of power and policy (Karolčík et al., 2025). In Indonesia, studies of novice voters and digital publics similarly find that low levels of media and political literacy make citizens vulnerable to hoaxes, populist narratives, and clientelist mobilization, even as their online engagement appears intense (Ridha & Riwanda, 2020; Septian & Wulandari, 2024).

International debates on civic education increasingly respond to this context by shifting the focus from transmitting canonical knowledge to cultivating critical, participatory, and justice-oriented forms of citizenship. Rather than treating learners as future voters who merely comply with rules, civic education is reconceptualized as a space for interrogating power, contesting injustice, and practicing democratic deliberation (Biesta, 2011; Johnson & Morris, 2010). Typologies of citizenship education distinguish between approaches that emphasize personal responsibility, those that priorities participation in established institutions, and those that foreground structural critique and social transformation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). More recent work on "critical affective civic literacy" further highlights the need to address emotions, identities, and political polarization in classrooms, not only cognitive skills (Keegan, 2021). Taken together, this literature suggests that meaningful political literacy requires both analytical competencies and opportunities to experience and reflect on democratic practices.

In Indonesia, civic education is institutionally anchored in Pancasila as the state ideology and in the long-standing subject of Pendidikan Pancasila (previously named as Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan/PPKn). The curriculum formally mandates schools and universities to nurture citizens who are democratic, pluralist, and committed to social justice, while also embodying the moral and spiritual values articulated in Pancasila. Empirical research shows that when civic education is organised around dialogic learning and school culture, it can contribute to more humanising and democratic interactions among students (Suyato, 2016). Recent studies also demonstrate the potential of Pancasila-based courses to strengthen digital literacy and political culture among Generation Z, particularly when learning is contextual, technology-enhanced, and project-based (Muhajir et al., 2025; Ramadhania et al., 2025). Parallel work on revitalizing citizenship education points to its role in fostering civic engagement for the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing critical reflection and social action beyond the classroom (Nasoha et al., 2025).

However, much of this emerging scholarship both international and Indonesian tends to treat clientelism, money politics, and other informal practices as background "problems" of the political system rather than as constitutive contexts that shape what and how citizens learn about politics. Studies on vote buying and electoral corruption in Indonesia reveal how everyday moralities of reciprocity, poverty, and local power relations normalize transactional politics (Muhtadi, 2019), yet these insights are rarely integrated into the conceptual foundations of civic education. Likewise, research on political literacy and digital participation among Indonesian youth documents vulnerabilities to disinformation and symbolic participation (Ridha & Riwanda, 2020; Septian & Wulandari, 2024), but seldom asks how

Pancasila-based civic education might explicitly confront and transform the clientelist political culture that underpins these patterns. This creates a conceptual gap: civic education is normatively expected to "strengthen democracy," while the pedagogical and curricular strategies needed to challenge clientelism as a lived political rationality remain weakly theorized.

Responding to the gap, the present conceptual article reconceptualizes civic education based on Pancasila ideology as a deliberate project of cultivating political literacy that is explicitly anti-clientelist. The central research question guiding the analysis is: How can Pancasila-based civic education be redesigned to nurture a politically literate citizenry capable of resisting clientelist political culture in contemporary Indonesia? More specifically, the article asks (1) what forms of political literacy are required to recognize and contest clientelist practices at multiple levels of politics; (2) how Pancasila's philosophical resources can be interpreted to support such critical and transformative learning; and (3) what implications follow for the aims, content, pedagogy, and assessment of civic education across school and higher-education settings. The objective is to develop a normative-analytical framework that can inform future empirical research and curriculum reform, positioning civic education not merely as instruction in constitutional facts, but as a sustained effort to re-educate citizens away from clientelism toward reflective, principle-driven democratic engagement.

Literature Review

Debates on the aims of civic education increasingly revolve around what kind of citizen schools should foster in contemporary democracies. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) distinguish between "personally responsible," "participatory," and "justice-oriented" citizens, showing how different programmatic emphases encode competing political imaginaries of democracy and citizenship. Johnson and Morris (2010) further argue that critical citizenship education must address four interrelated dimensions (political, social, self, and praxis) so that learners are able not only to obey rules or participate procedurally, but also to interrogate power relations and structural injustice. Biesta (2011) similarly warns that civic education risks being reduced to the technical implementation of policy goals if it forgets its inherently political task: enabling people to "learn democracy" as an ongoing, contested practice rather than merely "learning about" democratic institutions (Biesta, 2011). Together, these perspectives suggest that a meaningful conception of civic education must integrate democratic knowledge, critical judgment, and transformative agency.

Within this broader debate, political literacy is often highlighted as a key outcome of civic education, yet it is defined in diverse ways. Dudley and Gitelson (2002) conceptualize political literacy as a combination of factual knowledge, understanding of processes, and skills that enable citizens to interpret and evaluate political information, which in turn correlates with tolerance, efficacy, and participation. Empirical work on youth citizenship education indicates that structured curricula can modestly increase political engagement, but effects are uneven and mediated by school climate, pedagogical style, and wider political distrust (Pontes et al., 2019). More recent scholarship insists that political literacy cannot be reduced to cognitive competencies alone: Keegan (2021) proposes "critical affective civic literacy" to account for how emotions such as anger, fear, or hope shape how young people read and respond to political conflicts. These studies imply that political literacy is multi-dimensional (combining knowledge, critical reasoning, emotional discernment, and participatory skills) and that civic education must be designed to address all of these layers if it is to cultivate a politically literate citizenry rather than merely informed but compliant subjects.

Indonesian scholarship on Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan (PKn) has increasingly framed the subject as a strategic vehicle for strengthening democracy, yet the dominant orientations remain contested. Suyato (2016) criticizes the drift of citizenship education toward neoliberal agendas of producing

"productive, agile, smart, and governable" workers, and instead calls for a humanist school culture that enables students to experience democracy in participatory, dialogical ways. Other empirical studies show that PKn can positively shape students' political awareness and literacy when it moves beyond textbook-centered transmission toward dialogic, contextualized learning. Hidayati et al. (2022), for example, find that meaningful civic learning experiences are associated with higher levels of political literacy among university students. Kuwoto et al. (2024) demonstrate that integrating explicit political education into Pancasila and citizenship learning can strengthen students' political awareness, especially when learning tasks are connected to real political issues and encourage reflection on rights, obligations, and public problems. Similarly, Farikiansyah et al. (2024) show that political literacy cultivated through Pancasila and civic education is associated with the development of democratic attitudes and resistance to intolerant practices among learners. Despite these advances, much of the literature still treats political literacy as a largely cognitive or attitudinal outcome, paying limited attention to the structural and informal political contexts in which citizens actually use or fail to use their civic competencies.

A parallel but often disconnected body of political science research examines clientelism and informal institutions, offering crucial insights for contexts like Indonesia where electoral competition is saturated with patronage and vote buying. Hicken (2011) defines clientelism as a contingent exchange of targeted, often material benefits for political support, emphasizing how it distorts democratic accountability and public goods provision. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) propose a typology of formal–informal institutional interactions, including "competing" informal institutions that systematically undermine the rules and norms formally inscribed in law and policy. Building on Bourdieu, Auyero and Benzecry (2017) theorize the "clientelist habitus" as a set of cognitive and affective dispositions that normalize dependence on brokers and patrons in everyday life, making clientelist exchanges appear natural and morally acceptable rather than exceptional. In the Indonesian case, Muhtadi (2019) documents the pervasiveness and rationality of vote buying, showing how patronage networks and material vulnerabilities shape citizens' choices even under formally competitive, multiparty elections. These studies collectively suggest that in clientelist democracies, political learning is heavily mediated by informal practices and affective dispositions that can neutralize or redirect the effects of formal civic education.

Despite the conceptual richness of both civic-education and clientelism literatures, only a small number of works explicitly examine how formal civic education operates within, and potentially against, a clientelist political order in Indonesia. Existing PKn studies tend to assume a relatively linear relationship between improved political knowledge, stronger democratic attitudes, and more ethical political behavior (Hidayati et al., 2022; Kuwoto et al., 2024), while research on vote buying and clientelist networks often treats citizens as rational or habituated actors whose political choices are shaped primarily by material incentives and social obligations (Hicken, 2011; Muhtadi, 2019). There is limited theorization of how civic and political learning in schools might be re-designed specifically to help students recognize clientelist logics, interpret them through Pancasila's moral and constitutional values, and imagine alternative norms of political reciprocity and accountability. Moreover, affective dimensions of political learning (such as fear of losing access to patronage, shame, gratitude, or cynicism) are rarely integrated into models of political literacy within PKn, even though they are central to the reproduction of clientelist habitus (Auyero & Benzecry, 2017; Keegan, 2021).

This article addresses these gaps by reconceptualizing civic education based on Pancasila ideology as a form of political literacy explicitly oriented toward reading, critiquing, and transforming clientelist political relations. Drawing on frameworks of critical citizenship and democratic learning (Biesta, 2011; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and on theories of informal institutions and clientelist habitus (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Hicken, 2011; Auyero & Benzecry, 2017), we conceptualize PKn as a potential "competing institution" that can challenge, rather than inadvertently accommodate, clientelist norms. In this view, politically literate citizens are not only capable of

understanding constitutional rules and electoral procedures but are also able to recognize patronage as a violation of Pancasila's moral order, evaluate it critically in light of justice and the common good, and develop collective strategies for more accountable and programmatic political engagement. The literature reviewed here thus provides both the diagnostic tools and the conceptual vocabulary needed to formulate a Pancasila-based model of civic education that is context-sensitive to clientelism while normatively committed to deepening democratic citizenship.

Methods

The research methods should elaborate on the method utilized in addressing the issues including the method of analysis. Research methods consist of: data topology, data collection method, data analysis, and data visualization. It should contain enough details allowing the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of methods as well as the reliability and validity of findings. This study adopted a qualitative, multiple–case study design within an interpretive paradigm to explore how Pancasila-based civic education may cultivate political literacy in clientelist contexts. The case study approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of complex social phenomena in their real-life settings and allows for the integration of multiple data sources and levels of analysis (Yin, 2014). The data topology was deliberately constructed across three interconnected levels: (1) macro – national laws, curriculum frameworks, and official guidelines regulating Pancasila and civic education; (2) meso – institutional syllabi, lesson plans, assessment instruments, and classroom artefacts from selected upper-secondary schools and universities; and (3) micro – experiential accounts of teachers and students obtained through interviews, focus group discussions, and limited classroom observations. This layered topology made it possible to trace how normative commitments in policy travel into curricular texts, pedagogical practices, and lived experiences of political learning under clientelist conditions.

Data collection combined document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation. At the macro level, policy and curriculum documents were purposively selected based on their legal status and their direct relevance to Pancasila and civic education (e.g., education laws, curriculum regulations, and official teaching guidelines). At the meso level, schools and universities were identified through criterion sampling: institutions were included if they had established civic or Pancasila education courses and were in districts where money politics and patronage had been publicly documented in recent electoral cycles. From each institution, course syllabi, weekly lesson plans, assessment rubrics, and representative teaching materials from the most recent academic year were collected. At the micro level, semi-structured interviews were conducted with civic education lecturers and PPKn teachers with at least several years of teaching experience, alongside student participants who had completed at least one semester of the course. Interview protocols explored participants' understandings of the aims of civic education, their experiences discussing concrete political issues (including vote buying and patronage) in class, and their perceptions of how Pancasila values relate to everyday political practices. Focus group discussions with students were used to elicit collective narratives about encounters with clientelist practices during elections and to explore how they made sense of these experiences in light of classroom learning. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized.

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis approach, iteratively applied across all data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, researchers familiarised themselves with the corpus by repeated reading of policy texts, institutional documents, interview transcripts, and observation notes. Second, initial coding combined inductive codes emerging from the data (e.g., "normalising vote buying," "avoiding controversial topics," "invoking Pancasila as moral language," "ethical discomfort") with deductive codes drawn from the theoretical framework (e.g., "critical citizenship," "political literacy," "clientelist habitus," "formal–informal institutional interplay"). Codes were then grouped into candidate

themes describing how civic education was framed in policy, enacted in classrooms, and experienced by teachers and students in clientelist environments. Following Braun and Clarke's phases, themes were reviewed against the raw data, refined, and named to capture their central organising ideas.

To move beyond isolated case descriptions, an interactive model of qualitative data analysis was used, involving cycles of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Data condensation involved developing higher-order themes that connected the three data levels (macro, meso, micro) and clarified how Pancasila-based civic education interacted with clientelist political culture. Data display took the form of matrices and charts that juxtaposed, for example, policy prescriptions with institutional practices, or teacher narratives with student accounts, within and across institutions. These displays enabled systematic comparison of how explicitly clientelism was addressed, how political literacy was conceptualised, and how Pancasila values were invoked in practice. Conclusions were drawn through iterative movement between displays and raw data, searching for confirming and disconfirming evidence and considering rival explanations.

Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through several strategies consistent with naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation was achieved by comparing policy texts, institutional artefacts, and experiential accounts. Method triangulation was pursued through the combination of document analysis, interviews, focus groups, and observation. Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants to verify the plausibility of emerging interpretations and to correct factual inaccuracies, especially regarding institutional policies and classroom routines. An audit trail of analytic decisions was maintained through detailed memos documenting coding choices, theme development, and reflections on the researchers' positionality, thereby supporting dependability and confirmability.

Data visualisation functioned both as an analytic aid and as a communicative device. During analysis, concept maps and thematic matrices were used to visualise relationships between codes and themes across the three data levels, and to identify convergences and tensions between formal civic education aims and clientelist political realities (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). In presenting the findings', selected visualisations are included as summary tables mapping key themes across data sources, and as a schematic model illustrating how Pancasila-based civic education can operate as a competing institutional logic vis-à-vis clientelist political culture. These visualisations make the analytic process more transparent and allow readers to assess how the study moves from raw data to thematic claims and, ultimately, to a proposed reconceptualization of civic education.

Results

Clientelist Political Culture as a Background "Common Sense"

Across all four institutional cases, students and teachers described clientelist practices (vote buying, targeted distribution of goods during campaigns, and personalised access to local officials) as routine features of political life rather than exceptional deviations. Their accounts strongly echoed findings from broader Indonesian research, which documents how money politics has become a "new normal" in post-authoritarian elections (Muhtadi, 2019; Pahlevi & Amrurobbi, 2020). Students typically first encountered clientelism through family and community narratives long before taking any civic education course. In focus groups, they recounted relatives accepting small sums of cash, groceries, or building materials in exchange for electoral support and rarely labelling these exchanges as "corruption" or "undemocratic." Instead, they were framed as balas budi, bantuan, or rezeki—a moral vocabulary that resonates with the literature on "clientelist habitus," which emphasises the everyday, emotionally laden character of broker–voter ties (Auyero & Benzecry, 2017).

Teacher interviews confirmed that students are "not naïve" about such practices and frequently raise concrete examples in informal conversations. However, these experiences are not systematically integrated into planned classroom activities. This pattern is consistent with studies showing that democratic and citizenship learning occurs both in and beyond school, with everyday experiences in families and communities powerfully shaping young people's sense of "how politics really works" (Suyato, 2016). At the macro level, policy and curriculum documents present a highly sanitised picture of political life: they emphasise ideals such as participation, integrity, and human rights but mention money politics only briefly and generically, providing no guidance on how to address structurally embedded practices like vote buying in the classroom. This disjuncture produces what can be described as a split political consciousness: formal discourse in Pancasila and civic education presents an idealised, procedural democracy, while everyday political socialisation normalises clientelist exchange as common sense.

The meso-level institutional documents partially bridge, but often reproduce, this gap. In two institutions, lesson plans and assessment tasks included brief references to "negative phenomena in elections," with vote buying listed among examples. Yet such references appeared at the margins—often as optional discussion questions—rather than as central organising topics. In the remaining institutions, clientelism was absent from syllabi and teaching materials despite their location in districts with intense patronage competition. Teachers cited curriculum overload, exam pressures, and fear of appearing to criticise specific local actors as reasons for avoiding these "sensitive" issues, reflecting wider concerns in the literature about teachers' vulnerabilities when dealing with controversial political topics (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

These findings address the first research question: clientelist political culture shapes students' political socialisation by providing a deeply embodied sense of how politics operates, while formal civic education largely leaves this reality unexamined. In line with research on informal institutions and clientelism, which shows that informal rules often "compete" with or undermine formal democratic norms (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Hicken, 2011), the results suggest that clientelist common sense functions as a powerful hidden curriculum that can neutralise the normative messages of Pancasila-based civic education

Formal Aims of Civic Education and Limited Engagement with Clientelism

The second research question concerns the extent to which current Pancasila and civic education practices confront, normalise, or ignore clientelist arrangements. At the policy level, official documents articulate ambitious aims: students are expected to become democratic, critical, and morally grounded citizens who uphold justice, respect diversity, and contribute to the common good. Similar formulations appear in institutional syllabi, echoing global frameworks of critical and justice-oriented citizenship education (Johnson & Morris, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Biesta, 2011). Yet the political dimension of these aims is predominantly interpreted as constitutional literacy (knowing institutions, rights, and procedures) and basic participation (voting, joining organisations), with little explicit attention to structural power relations or informal institutions such as patronage networks.

When translated into classroom practice, this orientation tends to produce a civic education that is strong on normative messaging but weak on critical engagement with concrete political practices. Observations of lessons on elections and political parties showed that teachers typically emphasised legal procedures and the moral imperative to participate, with "money politics" mentioned briefly as something students should reject. Teachers reported that high-stakes examinations, prescriptive textbooks, and tight time allocations push them toward coverage of formal material, leaving little room for open-ended, context-based discussion. Concerns about being seen as "too political" or partisan—especially when discussing local actors—further constrained engagement with clientelist cases, a dilemma well

documented in research on teachers' handling of controversial issues in democratic classrooms (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

Students' accounts corroborate this picture. Many recalled that money politics was mentioned in Pendidikan Pancasila lessons but described such coverage as "superficial" and disconnected from experiences in their neighbourhoods. They explicitly distinguished between "politics in the book," which emphasises rights, institutions, and formal fairness, and "politics on the ground," which involves pressure from brokers, expectations of material benefits, and a pervasive distrust of politicians. These tensions mirror findings from survey-based studies showing that civic or PPKn learning can raise political literacy, but its influence on behaviour is mediated by contextual factors such as economic vulnerability and local political practices (Hidayati et al., 2022; Erlinda, 2023).

Overall, the results suggest that current Pancasila and civic education practices, while normatively committed to democratic ideals, largely bypass the structural and experiential dimensions of clientelist politics. Clientelism is treated as an individual moral failing or a peripheral anomaly, rather than as a systemic pattern that must be analysed and challenged. This limits the development of political literacy capable of recognising and interrogating clientelist arrangements in light of Pancasila's ethical commitments—a finding consistent with wider critiques that civic education often remains "thin" when it avoids sustained engagement with real power relations (Biesta, 2011; Johnson & Morris, 2010).

Emergent Critical Literacy and Ethical Discomfort in Classrooms

Despite these constraints, the study also identified pockets of practice where teachers and students began to develop more critical and reflective forms of political literacy. In three institutions, at least one teacher deliberately brought concrete local cases of vote buying, patronage-based recruitment, or targeted distribution of social assistance into classroom discussion. These teachers anonymised specific actors and focused on patterns, explicitly inviting students to analyse these practices through the lens of Pancasila's principles and constitutional norms. This approach resonates with the notion of the "political classroom," in which controversial public issues are treated as legitimate content for deliberation rather than avoided (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

Students in these classes reported feeling "recognised" when their lived experiences of politics were acknowledged in Pendidikan Pancasila. They described classroom discussions that helped them name the unease they had previously felt about clientelist exchanges within their families and communities. In line with Suyato's (2016) argument that democratic learning must connect school experiences with everyday life, these discussions blurred the boundary between formal lesson content and the "hidden curriculum" of local political practices. During observed sessions, students drew on Pancasila as a moral vocabulary to question whether accepting money or goods in exchange for votes was compatible with human dignity (kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab), social justice, and the common good. At the same time, many voiced counter-arguments grounded in economic necessity and distrust of politicians, showing that critical literacy emerges in tension with deeply rooted rationalisations of clientelism (Muhtadi, 2019).

These episodes generated what can be termed "ethical discomfort." Several students reported re-evaluating their own past or anticipated acceptance of clientelist benefits, and some initiated conversations with family members after class. This aligns with research on critical affective civic literacy, which argues that politicised emotions such as shame, anger, and hope are central to how young people navigate public life and should be explicitly addressed in civic education (Keegan, 2021). Nonetheless, the critical moments observed remained fragile. Students frequently reverted to pragmatic justifications ("if we do not take it, others will"), and teachers were acutely aware of institutional constraints that limited how far they could push such discussions. These findings highlight both the

potential and vulnerability of emergent critical literacy in clientelist contexts: without supportive institutional cultures and broader structural change, classroom interventions risk being reduced to episodic moral exhortations rather than sustained political education.

Dimensions of a Pancasila-Based Anti-Clientelist Political Literacy

Synthesising patterns across macro, meso, and micro data, the study identifies four interrelated dimensions of political literacy that appear necessary for resisting clientelist political culture and that can be grounded in Pancasila-based civic education. These dimensions respond directly to the third research question concerning how civic education might function as a "competing institution" to clientelism (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

The first dimension, structural awareness, refers to students' understanding of clientelism as embedded in broader configurations of inequality, institutional design, and party strategies, rather than as isolated moral failings. In classes where teachers mapped local patronage networks and linked them to research on money politics and vote buying, students began to frame clientelism as a systemic challenge to democratic accountability (Muhtadi, 2019; Pahlevi & Amrurobbi, 2020; Ridhuan, 2023). This structural perspective enabled them to situate personal and family decisions within larger power relations and to see Pancasila's values of social justice and rule of law as resources for critique.

The second dimension, ethical–political reasoning, captures the capacity to evaluate clientelist offers in light of Pancasila's normative commitments—human dignity, the common good, deliberative decision-making—rather than solely in terms of immediate material benefit. Where teachers invited students to deliberate concrete dilemmas (for example, whether to accept gifts from candidates, how to respond to pressure from brokers, or how to discuss these issues with elders), students practised weighing competing principles and consequences. This echoes calls in democratic education literature for citizenship learning that cultivates reasoning about "how we ought to live together," rather than mere compliance (Biesta, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The third dimension, critical affective sensibility, involves recognising and reflecting on the emotions attached to clientelist interactions, gratitude for immediate help, shame at being "bought," resentment toward unresponsive elites, or cynicism about politics. Focus group data showed that many students carried significant emotional ambivalence about clientelist practices but lacked a language to articulate it. When teachers legitimised these feelings and connected them to broader dynamics of political manipulation and injustice, students began to see their emotional responses as integral to political judgement. This finding aligns with Keegan's (2021) conceptualisation of critical affective civic literacy, which urges civic educators to treat emotions as central rather than peripheral to political learning. In the context of clientelist habitus, such affective awareness is crucial for unsettling tacit dispositions that make patronage feel natural and morally acceptable (Auyero & Benzecry, 2017).

The fourth dimension, imagining and practising alternative forms of participation, refers to the development of practical repertoires that allow young citizens to engage politically without relying on clientelist exchanges. In a minority of cases, students were involved in activities such as monitoring elections, participating in school or campus forums, or organising community initiatives around local issues without partisan sponsorship. These experiences resonate with research on youth civic engagement that identifies multiple forms of action—such as grassroots organising, public problem-solving, and participatory evaluation—as pathways to more substantive democratic participation (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). However, such experiences remained uneven and heavily dependent on individual teachers' initiative, underscoring the need for institutional support and policy frameworks that systematically open non-clientelist avenues for youth participation.

Taken together, these four dimensions outline an emergent model of Pancasila-based political literacy oriented against clientelism. They suggest that reconceptualising civic education in clientelist contexts requires more than adding "anti–money politics" messages to existing curricula; it entails designing learning experiences that build structural awareness, ethical–political reasoning, critical affective sensibility, and repertoires of alternative participation. In the subsequent discussion, the article elaborates this model as a theoretical contribution and considers its implications for the aims, content, pedagogy, and assessment of civic education in Indonesia's clientelist democracy.

Discussion

The research result and discussion section contain results of the research findings and their ensuing discussions. The findings acquired from the results of the conducted research should be written with the supplementary support of adequate data. The research results and findings should be able to resolve or provide explanations to the question stated in the introduction and also contains with the author's analysis of the findings by connecting the empirical data with the theory used. The findings of this study show that civic education in the investigated settings operates within, rather than outside of, a dense web of clientelist relations that structure young citizens' political learning long before and beyond the classroom. Students' early exposure to vote buying, targeted distribution of goods, and personalised access to local officials through family and community interactions confirms comparative work on the centrality of clientelism in many electoral democracies (Hicken, 2011; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). At the same time, the moral vocabularies that students use (balas budi, bantuan, rezeki) mirror what Auyero and Benzecry (2017) conceptualise as a clientelist habitus: a set of embodied dispositions and culturally resonant justifications through which clientelist exchanges become normalised and emotionally meaningful. The "split political consciousness" identified in the results (between "politics in the book" and "politics on the ground") thus reflects the co-existence of formal democratic norms and powerful informal institutions that often "compete" with or subvert those norms (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). From this perspective, the first research question is answered in a way that complicates conventional models of political socialisation: civic education cannot be understood as the primary source of political learning, but as one institutional actor among many, whose effects are mediated by clientelist practices and habitus.

With respect to the second research question, the results indicate that Pancasila- and civic-education practices in the studied institutions are normatively ambitious but politically "thin." At the macro and meso levels, official aims emphasise democratic character, constitutional literacy, and participation in ways that resonate with global discourses on citizenship education (Johnson & Morris, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Biesta, 2011). However, the translation of these aims into classroom practice tends to foreground procedural knowledge and moral exhortation, while largely avoiding sustained engagement with clientelist structures. Clientelism appears as an abstract "negative phenomenon" or a matter of individual morality, not as a systematic pattern of political linkage that reshapes accountability, representation, and public goods provision (Hicken, 2011; Muhtadi, 2019). This avoidance can be partly explained by teachers' institutional vulnerabilities and fears of being perceived as partisan when discussing local actors, echoing Hess and McAvoy's (2015) findings about the risks teachers perceive when handling controversial political issues. Yet the effect, as the data show, is that students learn much about how elections should work, and relatively little about how clientelist practices actually operate and why they persist.

These dynamics help explain why improvements in students' political knowledge and generic "awareness" documented in prior Indonesian studies (e.g., Hidayati et al., 2022; Kuwoto et al., 2024) do not automatically translate into robust resistance to money politics. When civic education is decoupled from the informal institutions that shape everyday political experiences, its messages are easily reinterpreted or neutralised within the clientelist habitus. The findings thus support critiques of what

Biesta (2011) calls "thin" democracy in education where citizenship is framed largely in terms of formal compliance and individual virtues and of civic education that fails to situate learners within real structures of power (Johnson & Morris, 2010). In the studied cases, Pancasila often appears as a moral slogan to be recited rather than as a critical lens for interrogating clientelism as a violation of human dignity, social justice, and the public good.

At the same time, the emergence of "ethical discomfort" and critical dialogue in certain classrooms shows that Pancasila-based civic education can function as a competing institutional logic vis-à-vis clientelism under specific conditions. When teachers deliberately bring concrete local cases of vote buying and patronage into the classroom and invite students to evaluate them through Pancasila's principles, they enact what Hess and McAvoy (2015) term a "political classroom"—a space where controversial issues are not avoided but used as core content for democratic deliberation. In these moments, students begin to connect their lived experiences of clientelist exchanges with normative frameworks and to articulate ambivalence, unease, or indignation. This aligns with Keegan's (2021) argument that civic education must engage the affective dimensions of political life—shame, anger, gratitude, cynicism—if it is to cultivate what she calls critical affective civic literacy. The results suggest that without such engagement, civic education risks leaving the emotional infrastructure of clientelism intact even as it condemns the practice at the level of abstract doctrine.

The four dimensions of Pancasila-based anti-clientelist political literacy identified in the results (structural awareness, ethical) political reasoning, critical affective sensibility, and alternative repertoires of participation can be read as an attempt to operationalise the convergence between critical citizenship education and the sociology of clientelism. Structural awareness corresponds to the "political" dimension in Johnson and Morris's (2010) framework, but reinterpreted in light of clientelist democracies: students must understand how patronage networks, electoral incentives, and economic vulnerability shape political behaviour, not only how formal institutions are designed. Ethical–political reasoning resonates with Biesta's (2011) insistence that democratic education concerns questions of "how we ought to live together" and with Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) notion of "justice-oriented" citizenship; Pancasila provides a locally grounded ethical vocabulary through which clientelist practices can be evaluated as unjust, rather than merely illegal or inefficient. Critical affective sensibility brings Keegan's (2021) insights into conversation with Auyero and Benzecry's (2017) clientelist habitus: if habitus is partly affective, then reshaping political dispositions requires working through emotions, not bypassing them. Finally, alternative forms of participation connect with research on youth civic engagement that emphasises the importance of concrete, non-clientelist opportunities for public problem-solving (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). Without such alternatives, calls to reject clientelism remain normatively compelling but practically empty.

These conceptual linkages constitute the article's main theoretical contribution. While previous Indonesian studies have demonstrated that PPKn and Pancasila education can enhance students' political knowledge, digital literacy, and generic political awareness (e.g., Ridha & Riwanda, 2020; Muhajir et al., 2025; Kuwoto et al., 2024), they have rarely theorised civic education as a formal institution that interacts with clientelist informal institutions in the sense outlined by Helmke and Levitsky (2004). The present study suggests that civic education can indeed act as a "competing" institution, but only if it explicitly addresses the structures and emotional dynamics of clientelism and offers concrete repertoires of non-clientelist participation. Otherwise, it risks becoming an "accommodating" institution one that teaches democratic ideals while leaving intact the practices that undermine them. By articulating Pancasila-based political literacy along the four dimensions identified, the article offers a framework for designing civic education that is both context-sensitive and normatively robust.

Practically, the findings point to several implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and policy. First, curriculum documents need to move beyond generic references to "money politics" and

include explicit expectations that students analyse local clientelist practices through Pancasila and constitutional principles. This would align the formal curriculum with the realities students already encounter and legitimise teachers' efforts to engage controversial issues. Second, teacher education programmes should prepare prospective Pendidikan Pancasila and Pancasila educators to facilitate issue-based, dialogical pedagogy that integrates structural analysis and affective reflection, drawing on both international models of critical citizenship education and indigenous ethical resources. Third, policy-makers and school leaders should create institutional protections and support mechanisms for teachers who address clientelist politics in the classroom, recognising that such work is central to democratic and anti-corruption agendas, not an optional add-on.

Finally, the study's limitations also suggest directions for further research. The multiple–case study design allowed for rich, contextualised insights, but it did not trace long-term changes in students' behaviour or examine variations across a wider range of regions and institutional types. Future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to investigate how Pancasila-based anti-clientelist political literacy develops over time and under different structural conditions, as well as to measure the impact of specific pedagogical interventions. Nonetheless, by empirically documenting the tensions between civic education and clientelist political culture and by proposing a Pancasila-based conceptual model of political literacy, the present study responds to the questions posed in the introduction: it explains how clientelism shapes political learning, shows why current civic education practices are insufficient, and offers a theoretically grounded pathway for reconceptualising civic education as a site of resistance to, rather than reproduction of, clientelist democracy.

Conclusion

This study set out to reconceptualize civic education based on Pancasila ideology to cultivate political literacy in settings where clientelist political culture is pervasive. Rather than treating civic education as a neutral conveyor of constitutional knowledge, the analysis has positioned it as one formal institution among many, operating within a field structured by informal practices such as vote buying, patronage, and personalized exchanges of favour. The findings indicate that young citizens learn the "rules of the game" of politics primarily through clientelist experiences in families and communities, while formal civic education tends to offer an idealised, procedural image of democracy that rarely engages this reality. In this context, the central research question can be answered as follows: civic education can only meaningfully "educate" political life when it explicitly acknowledges, interprets, and contests clientelism, rather than bypassing it as an unfortunate anomaly.

The study has also shown that current Pancasila and civic education practices, though normatively ambitious, remain politically thin in their engagement with informal institutions. Policy and curricular aims emphasize democratic character and participation, yet in practice these aims are often translated into procedural literacy and moral exhortations that do not fully equip students to understand or resist clientelist arrangements. At the same time, the empirical material reveals that when teachers deliberately bring concrete local practices of clientelism into the classroom and invite students to reflect on them through Pancasila's ethical framework, more critical and affective forms of political literacy begin to emerge. On this basis, the article proposes four interrelated dimensions of a Pancasila-based anti-clientelist political literacy (structural awareness, ethical–political reasoning, critical affective sensibility, and non-clientelist repertoires of participation) as a conceptual framework for reorienting civic education in clientelist democracies. These dimensions synthesize insights from critical citizenship education, theories of informal institutions, and the notion of clientelist habitus, providing a theoretically grounded answer to the research objective of designing civic education as a "competing" institutional logic vis-à-vis clientelism.

Building on these conclusions, several suggestions can be advanced for future practice and research. At the policy and curriculum level, there is a need to move beyond generic denunciations of "money politics" by embedding explicit expectations that students analyse local clientelist patterns using Pancasila and constitutional principles. This requires curricular space for issue-based, context-sensitive learning and assessment that values structural analysis and ethical deliberation, not only recall of institutional facts. In teacher education, programmes should more systematically prepare prospective Pendidikan Pancasila and Pancasila educators to handle controversial political issues, to facilitate dialogic and affectively aware discussions, and to draw on Pancasila as a critical, not merely ceremonial, ideological resource. School leaders and higher-education authorities should, in turn, provide institutional backing and protection for such practices, recognising that engaging with clientelism is integral to democratic and anti-corruption agendas.

For research, the conceptual model developed here invites empirical testing and refinement in broader and more diverse settings. Longitudinal studies could investigate how the proposed dimensions of political literacy develop over time and whether they translate into observable changes in young citizens' responses to clientelist overtures. Mixed-method and comparative designs across regions and school types could examine how structural factors (such as the intensity of patronage networks, socio-economic conditions, or local political histories) condition the effectiveness of Pancasila-based civic interventions. Finally, design-based research that co-develops and evaluates specific pedagogical innovations with teachers and students would help translate the framework into actionable strategies and generate evidence on which combinations of content, methods, and institutional supports most effectively enable civic education to operate as a site of resistance to, rather than reproduction of, clientelist democracy.

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