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Civic Literacy, Democratic Attitudes, and Civic Participation among Preservice Elementary Teachers

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Abstract

Civic education in teacher preparation should integrate civic knowledge, democratic dispositions, and the capacity for constructive participation in public life. This article presents an illustrative analysis of the associations of civic literacy and democratic attitudes with civic participation, using the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) program at Campus V UNM Parepare for April–May 2026 as the specified context. The analysis used 65 constructed records representing semesters 2, 4, and 6 within a specified range of semesters 1–6. Each construct was represented by an eight-item Likert scale. Analyses included descriptive statistics, item–total correlations, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression with HC3 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. In the constructed dataset, civic literacy was positively correlated with civic participation ($r = .499$, $p < .001$), as were democratic attitudes ($r = .380$, $p = .002$). In the joint regression model, civic literacy retained a statistically significant positive association with participation ($B = .499$, $p = .002$), whereas the association for democratic attitudes did not reach statistical significance ($B = .257$, $p = .081$). The model accounted for 30.0% of the variance in participation. These results are illustrative and do not constitute verified field findings. The article provides an analytical framework for examining civic literacy, democratic attitudes, and civic participation together and for considering their integration into elementary teacher education.

Keywords: Civic Literacy; Democratic Attitudes; Civic Participation; Preservice Teachers; Civic Education

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INTRODUCTION

Civic education is expected to prepare citizens to understand public institutions, recognise rights and responsibilities, deliberate across differences, and participate in collective decisions. In democratic societies, these capacities are not acquired through factual instruction alone. They emerge through the interaction of knowledge, democratic dispositions, and opportunities to practise participation. Galston (2001) argues that political knowledge is connected with democratic principles and participation, while Flanagan and Levine (2010) situate civic engagement within the transition to adulthood. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) distinguish personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented conceptions of citizenship. This distinction is important for teacher education because future elementary teachers will not merely teach civic concepts; they will also shape the classroom practices through which children experience fairness, voice, cooperation, and public responsibility.

Contemporary civic life increasingly includes digital discussion, where participation ranges from informed deliberation to unreflective sharing. A meta-analysis found a positive but not uniformly causal relationship between social media use and participation (Boulianne, 2015), while Indonesian research links political discussion and social networks with student political efficacy (Mashud et al., 2023). Civic literacy is therefore relevant to evaluating information as well as understanding institutions.

The present article focuses on students enrolled in Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD). This population has a dual civic role: students are emerging adult citizens and future teachers who will mediate children's early encounters with democratic life. White (2024), in a study of 235 preservice elementary teachers, found that civic awareness, commitment to social issues, and interpersonal skills were associated with expectations about future civic teaching. This suggests that teacher candidates' civic competencies may be relevant to both their own engagement and their future pedagogical decisions. For the same reason, civic literacy in PGSD should be understood as a professional and civic resource rather than a narrow achievement in a compulsory course.

The researcher's position is that civic participation is best understood as a behavioural expression of more than one civic competency. Civic literacy provides the cognitive resources needed to recognise issues, understand rights and responsibilities, and assess possible responses. Democratic attitudes provide the normative orientation needed to

respect pluralism, accept disagreement, value equal participation, and prefer deliberative solutions. Participation may then take the form of volunteering, student organisation activity, community problem-solving, public discussion, or responsible digital engagement. These dimensions are related but not interchangeable. A student may know constitutional principles without regularly participating, while another may participate in community activities without being able to explain the institutional or legal context of the issue.

Previous research supports the relevance of each dimension but also reveals a need for more integrated analysis. Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) conceptualised active citizenship through community life, representative democracy, protest and social change, and democratic values. Ekman and Amnå (2012) differentiated manifest political participation from latent civic engagement and social involvement. Andolina et al. (2002) likewise show that youth civic engagement includes multiple forms of community and political activity. Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) likewise argued for an integrative perspective that distinguishes engagement—interest, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs—from participation as observable behaviour. These conceptualisations caution against measuring citizenship through a single indicator. They also provide a rationale for examining whether knowledge and democratic dispositions jointly relate to participatory behaviour.

Empirical studies have shown that civic learning environments can support participation. Campbell (2008) found that an open classroom climate was associated with civic knowledge and informed voting intentions. Kahne and Sporte (2008), using data from more than four thousand students, reported that specific civic learning opportunities strengthened commitments to civic participation. Pasek et al. (2008) also linked sustained civic education experiences with political efficacy and attentiveness. Quintelier (2010) further demonstrates that school contexts can shape young people's political participation. At the university level, Hylton (2018) reported positive relationships between civic literacy, social empathy, and civic engagement. These studies are valuable, yet their contexts and measures differ, and many focus on school-age adolescents or broad university populations rather than future elementary teachers.

Indonesian scholarship has increasingly examined civic literacy and digital citizenship. Alrakhman et al. (2024) explored the relationship between digital citizenship and the quality of civic education learning. Sukmayadi et al. (2025) examined the strengthening of civic literacy through civic education courses, while Kothen et al. (2025) discussed dialogic,

analytical, and issue-based political education practices. Sutisna et al. (2026) further argued for contextual, transformative, and participatory approaches to Pancasila education. Mulyoto et al. (2026) connect critical thinking and digital literacy with civic engagement in project-based civic learning. Recent work also identifies pedagogical and structural barriers to cultivating participatory civic skills in Indonesian higher education (Retnasari et al., 2026). These contributions show the growing attention to civic literacy, but they do not remove the need to examine how civic literacy and democratic attitudes operate together in a PGSD setting.

A further gap concerns the distinction between civic engagement as an orientation and participation as action. Participation may be constrained when institutions offer few meaningful channels for youth voice (Bessant, 2004; Djuyandi et al., 2023). Accordingly, the present model focuses on individual competencies while recognising that campus climate and access to participation opportunities also matter.

The theoretical foundation integrates three complementary perspectives. First, civic competence is treated as a combination of knowledge, dispositions, and skills, consistent with the civic competency framework discussed by White (2024). Second, active citizenship is understood as multidimensional, drawing on Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) and Ekman and Amnå (2012). Third, democratic education is understood as a process that should develop participatory and justice-oriented citizenship rather than only personal responsibility, following Westheimer and Kahne (2004). Within this integrated framework, civic literacy represents the cognitive dimension, democratic attitudes represent the dispositional dimension, and civic participation represents the behavioural dimension.

The novelty of the proposed analysis lies in examining the joint contribution of civic literacy and democratic attitudes to civic participation among future elementary teachers in a local Indonesian teacher-education context. The analysis does not claim that these two predictors exhaust the determinants of participation. Instead, it offers a focused model that can be extended by including political efficacy, social empathy, digital civic literacy, campus climate, and access to community-based learning. The numerical dataset used here is constructed for illustration because verified respondent records were not supplied; it must not be interpreted as evidence from actual students.

Accordingly, this article examines the illustrative relationship between civic literacy, democratic attitudes, and civic participation among PGSD preservice teachers. Specifically,

it presents the individual associations of civic literacy and democratic attitudes with participation and estimates their combined contribution through multiple regression. It also demonstrates reporting of instrument consistency, assumption testing, robust regression, and transparent presentation of a non-significant adjusted predictor.

METHODS

Type of research

The article uses a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational framework. The purpose of this design is to estimate associations among three measured constructs at one point in time rather than to establish temporal order or causal effects. The design is appropriate for an initial model in which civic literacy and democratic attitudes are treated as explanatory variables and civic participation as the outcome. The numerical records are constructed for illustration and do not represent responses collected from students.

Research setting and period

The proposed research context is Campus V of Universitas Negeri Makassar in Parepare, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, during April–May 2026. These location and period details follow the study context provided by the author; however, the available constructed dataset does not verify that fieldwork took place at that location and time. Before empirical submission, the author should confirm the actual research schedule, institutional permission, and data-collection records.

Participants and sampling technique

The revised file contains 65 constructed, anonymised records representing PGSD undergraduate students. The eligibility scope is limited to students in semesters 1–6; the available records in this illustrative file are from semesters 2 (n = 18), 4 (n = 22), and 6 (n = 25). The file includes 42 female and 23 male records. These values are not a verified student roster or a realised recruitment record. In an actual field study, the population should be defined from the current PGSD student register, eligibility criteria should be specified, and a proportionate stratified or total sampling procedure should be selected according to the accessible population and research permissions.

Instruments and data collection

Three self-report scales were modelled, each consisting of eight positively keyed statements scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The civic literacy scale covers understanding of Pancasila and constitutional principles, rights and responsibilities, public institutions, local and national issues, and the evaluation of civic information. The democratic attitudes scale covers respect for pluralism, equality, tolerance, deliberation, rule of law, and acceptance of disagreement. The civic participation scale covers campus and community involvement, volunteering, collaborative problem-solving, public discussion, and responsible digital participation. Construct scores were calculated as the mean of their eight items.

Validity, reliability, and ethical considerations

Item performance was examined through corrected item-total correlations, while internal consistency was estimated with Cronbach's alpha. In the constructed records, corrected item-total correlations ranged from .638 to .761 for civic literacy, .655 to .807 for democratic attitudes, and .685 to .850 for civic participation. The corresponding alpha coefficients were .905, .924, and .937. These values describe consistency within the constructed file only; they do not establish the validity or reliability of an instrument administered to real students. Actual use requires expert review for content relevance, cognitive interviewing or pilot testing, and reliability analysis based on genuine responses. Any real study must secure institutional approval where required, provide informed consent, protect anonymity, and allow voluntary withdrawal.

Data analysis technique

The analysis was conducted using Python with pandas, SciPy, and statsmodels. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each construct. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to estimate bivariate associations. Multiple linear regression was then fitted with civic participation as the dependent variable and civic literacy and democratic attitudes as simultaneous predictors. Residual normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test; linear specification was checked with the Ramsey RESET test; multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors; and heteroskedasticity was examined with the Breusch–Pagan test. Because the Breusch–Pagan test indicated heteroskedasticity, HC3 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors were used for coefficient inference. Statistical

significance was evaluated at .05, while effect magnitude was considered through standardised coefficients and the coefficient of determination.

RESULTS

The results below are calculated from 65 constructed records restricted to the semester 1–6 eligibility range. The available records represent semesters 2, 4, and 6. Table 1 describes the illustrative profile: 42 records (64.6%) are female and 23 (35.4%) are male. Semester 6 accounts for the largest group (n = 25; 38.5%), followed by semester 4 (n = 22; 33.8%) and semester 2 (n = 18; 27.7%). These distributions are not verified institutional statistics.

Table 1. Illustrative profile of PGSD records within the semester 1–6 scope

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	42	64.6
Gender	Male	23	35.4
Semester	2	18	27.7
Semester	4	22	33.8
Semester	6	25	38.5

Table 2 shows that the three construct means are close to 4.00 on a five-point scale. Civic literacy has a mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.70), democratic attitudes have a mean of 3.98 (SD = 0.78), and civic participation has a mean of 3.94 (SD = 0.84). The minimum values range from 1.25 to 2.50, indicating that lower responses are also represented. These descriptive values summarise the constructed records and should not be interpreted as evidence about the actual PGSD student cohort.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the three constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Civic literacy	4.000	0.702	2.500	5.000
Democratic attitudes	3.985	0.781	2.125	5.000
Civic participation	3.938	0.835	1.250	5.000

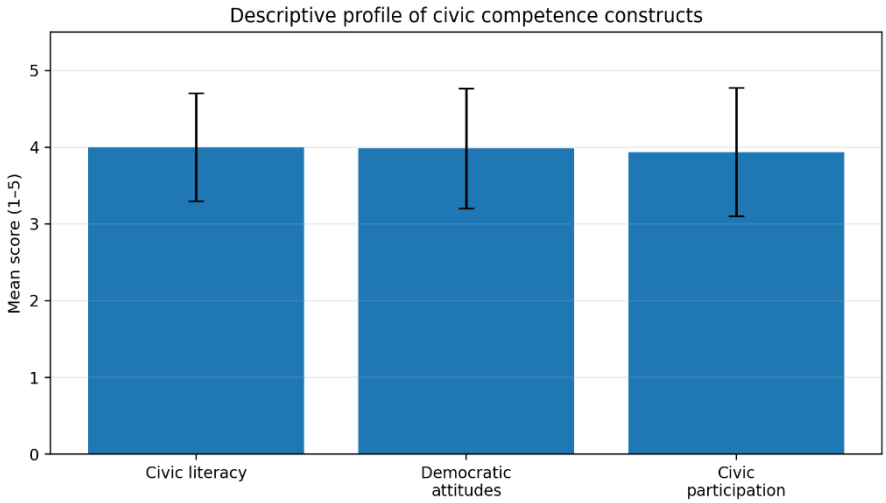


Figure 1. Descriptive profile of the three civic competence constructs

The instrument diagnostics are summarised in Table 3. Corrected item-total correlations range from .638 to .850, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from .905 to .937. These values indicate high internal consistency within the constructed records. However, high alpha values alone do not establish content validity, dimensionality, or suitability for use with actual respondents. Item wording and construct coverage should be reviewed before field administration.

Table 3. Corrected item-total correlations and internal consistency

Construct	Corrected item-total r	Cronbach's α	Items
Civic literacy	0.638–0.761	0.905	8
Democratic attitudes	0.655–0.807	0.924	8
Civic participation	0.685–0.850	0.937	8

As reported in Table 4, civic literacy is positively correlated with civic participation ($r = .499$, $p < .001$), and democratic attitudes are also positively correlated with civic participation ($r = .380$, $p = .002$). The correlation between civic literacy and democratic attitudes is $r = .334$ ($p = .006$). The associations are positive and moderate in magnitude, indicating that higher scores on either predictor tend to accompany higher participation scores in this constructed dataset. The correlations do not establish causation.

Table 4. Pearson correlations among study constructs

Variable	1	2	3
1. Civic literacy	1.000	0.334**	0.499***
2. Democratic attitudes	0.334**	1.000	0.380**
3. Civic participation	0.499***	0.380**	1.000

The regression diagnostics in Table 5 indicate that the residual distribution does not significantly depart from normality (Shapiro–Wilk W = .977, p = .282). The RESET test is non-significant (F = 2.543, p = .116), and the maximum VIF among the two predictors is 1.126, suggesting no multicollinearity concern. The Durbin–Watson statistic is 2.101. The Breusch–Pagan test is significant (LM = 7.666, p = .022), indicating heteroskedasticity; accordingly, HC3 robust standard errors are used for coefficient inference.

Table 5. Regression diagnostic tests

Diagnostic	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Shapiro–Wilk residual normality	W = 0.977	0.282	No significant departure
Ramsey RESET	F = 2.543	0.116	No detectable specification concern
Maximum VIF	1.126	—	No multicollinearity concern
Breusch–Pagan	LM = 7.666	0.022	Heteroskedasticity; HC3 used
Durbin–Watson	2.101	—	Residual autocorrelation not suggested

Table 6 presents the robust regression estimates. Civic literacy has a positive coefficient (B = .499, HC3 SE = .154, t = 3.229, p = .002, 95% CI [.190, .808]) and a standardised coefficient of β = .419. Democratic attitudes also have a positive coefficient (B = .257, HC3 SE = .145, t = 1.771, p = .081, 95% CI [−.033, .546]) with β = .240, but this adjusted association is not statistically significant at the .05 level. The model explains 30.0% of the variance in civic participation (R^2 = .300; adjusted R^2 = .278), and the HC3 robust overall model test is significant (F = 10.28, p < .001). The remaining 70.0% of the variance is not explained by these two predictors.

Table 6. Multiple regression predicting civic participation (HC3 robust inference)

Predictor	B	HC3 SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.921	0.712	—	1.294	0.201	[−0.502, 2.343]
Civic literacy	0.499	0.154	0.419	3.229	0.002	[0.190, 0.808]
Democratic attitudes	0.257	0.145	0.240	1.771	0.081	[−0.033, 0.546]

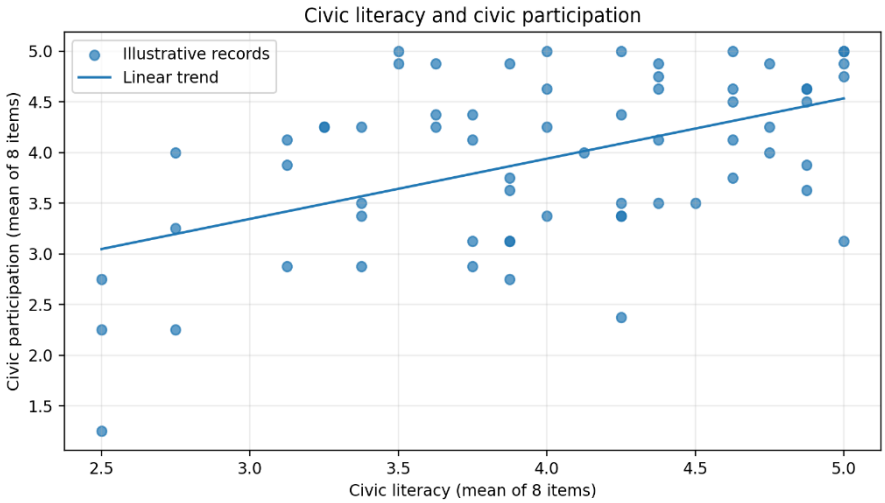


Figure 2. Association between civic literacy and civic participation.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the principal findings

The illustrative regression pattern indicates that civic literacy and democratic attitudes are each positively associated with civic participation at the bivariate level. However, when both predictors are entered simultaneously, civic literacy remains statistically significant whereas democratic attitudes do not ($p = .081$). This difference between the correlation and adjusted regression results suggests that part of the bivariate association of democratic attitudes with participation may overlap with civic literacy. The result should not be read as evidence that democratic attitudes are unimportant; rather, the constructed data do not establish a distinct contribution after controlling for civic literacy.

Civic literacy as a cognitive resource

The positive civic literacy coefficient is consistent with the argument that knowledge provides citizens with resources for identifying public issues and selecting meaningful responses. Galston (2001) connects political knowledge with democratic principles and political participation, while Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) include democratic values and representative participation within a broader active-citizenship framework. Hylton (2018) likewise reports a positive relationship between civic literacy and civic engagement among university students. The present illustrative model extends this line of reasoning to PGSD

preservice teachers by treating literacy as a combination of knowledge about institutions, rights, responsibilities, public issues, and the evaluation of civic information.

Democratic attitudes as a normative orientation

The positive relationship between democratic attitudes and participation indicates that the willingness to respect differences, deliberate, and recognise equal civic standing may be relevant to participatory behaviour. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that democratic education should not be confined to the personally responsible citizen but should also cultivate participatory and justice-oriented forms of citizenship. Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) further distinguish attitudes and beliefs from actual participatory behaviours while showing why they should be analysed together. In a teacher-education context, democratic attitudes are especially important because preservice teachers will later organise classroom dialogue, manage disagreement, and model fair decision-making for children.

Relationship with prior empirical studies

The pattern is broadly consistent with studies linking classroom opportunities and civic learning to later engagement. Campbell (2008) found that an open classroom climate was associated with civic knowledge and informed voting intentions. Kahne and Sporte (2008) demonstrated that civic learning opportunities can strengthen students' commitment to civic participation, and Pasek et al. (2008) reported longer-term relationships between civic education experiences and political efficacy. White (2024) provides a particularly relevant comparison because the study examined civic competencies among preservice elementary teachers and found that civic awareness, social issue commitment, and interpersonal skills were associated with expected future civic teaching. The present model is narrower in outcome, focusing on participation rather than future teaching intentions.

The Indonesian higher-education context

Recent Indonesian studies highlight the importance of connecting civic learning with current social and political issues. Mashud et al. (2023) identify political discussion and social networks as relevant to student political efficacy. Alrakhman et al. (2024) discuss digital citizenship in the quality of civic education learning, while Sukmayadi et al. (2025) and Kothen et al. (2025) emphasise civic literacy and dialogic or issue-based learning. Sutisna et al. (2026) call for transformative and participatory Pancasila education, and Retnasari et al. (2026) describe pedagogical and structural barriers to participatory civic skills in Indonesian

higher education. Together, these studies suggest that the development of civic competence requires both individual preparation and meaningful institutional opportunities.

Participation is not determined by individual competence alone

The model explains 30.0% of the variance, leaving most variation outside the two predictors. Participation is therefore likely to depend on institutional opportunities as well as individual competencies. Campus climate, student organisations, community partnerships, and access to public forums may shape whether civic intentions become action.

Implications for elementary teacher preparation

For PGSD curricula, the findings support an approach that connects civic knowledge with democratic practice. Courses can use local public issues as case material, ask students to distinguish evidence from opinion, and organise structured deliberation in which participants must justify claims and respond respectfully to counterarguments. Service-learning and community-based projects can provide opportunities to move from discussion to action, while reflective writing can help students connect experience with constitutional values and civic responsibilities. Digital citizenship activities should include source evaluation, respectful disagreement, privacy, and the consequences of sharing information. Such strategies are consistent with the broader active-citizenship perspective advanced by Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) and the participatory conception of democratic education described by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

Limitations and directions for future research

The principal limitation is that all numerical records are constructed and are not verified field observations. The requested location and dates identify the intended research context but do not confirm that data were collected there. The analysis is also restricted to records within the semester 1–6 range and includes only semesters 2, 4, and 6. The cross-sectional model cannot establish causality or distinguish stable participation from short-term self-reported intention. Self-report measures may be affected by social desirability, and the model does not include institutional opportunities, civic efficacy, empathy, digital literacy, or prior organisational experience. Future empirical work should collect verified data, obtain the required ethical approval, test the instrument with real respondents, and consider a broader sample and mixed-methods follow-up.

CONCLUSION

This article presents an illustrative three-dimensional framework in which civic literacy and democratic attitudes are positively associated with civic participation among PGSD preservice teachers. In the constructed records, civic literacy is a significant adjusted predictor (B = .499, p = .002), while democratic attitudes are not independently significant after controlling for civic literacy (B = .257, p = .081). The model accounts for 30.0% of the variance in participation. These numerical results are not empirical evidence about actual students.

The article contributes an analytical framework for examining civic competencies in elementary teacher education and highlights the need to connect classroom learning with authentic participatory opportunities. The numerical results must be replaced with verified field data before scholarly submission as an empirical study. Future research should test the proposed relationships with actual participants, include institutional and contextual variables, and examine whether civic learning experiences produce sustained participation over time.

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