



Strengthening Students' Civic Character through the Pancasila Student Profile Project in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study explored how the concept of the Pancasila Student Profile Project can be used within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum and how it can be used to foster the development of the civic character of SMIP Universitas Simalungun students. Due to the perceived mismatches between moral teaching and practical implementation in civic education, a qualitative methodological approach was implemented to evaluate how the project-based learning and institutional practices were implemented in the enactment of character values. The data were gathered through the in-depth interview with school leaders and teachers, classroom observations, and institutional documentation analysis. Data were analyzed using an iterative coding and thematic interpretation to evoke patterns of pedagogical practice, engagement of students, and organizational support. Results indicate that before the project was carried out, civic learning was more theoretical and external thus constraining the internalization of moral values. Constant engagement in participative and situational learning processes contributed to the gradual enhancement of responsibility, social awareness and participatory confidence in the students. Some of the most important facilitators of this change were institutional coordination, reflective evaluation and collaboration among teachers. In addition, the element of the Simalungun local wisdom solidified the moral identity of the students by connecting the national civic principles to the traditionally based ethics. The research indicates that participatory pedagogy, unified institutional design, and culturally sensitive learning conditions are the conditions of the successful construction of civic character in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Introduction

In Indonesia, the conceptualization of education has always been based on the moral and civic venture that goes beyond transferring academic knowledge (Cahya & Meliyani, 2025; Soegiono & Ningrum, 2025; Robandi et al., 2025). The schools are charged with the responsibility of producing individuals who are ethically aware and responsible in the society and who possess good citizenship values. This is enshrined in the national education policies that are based on producing loyal, principled, creative, independent and committed learners to democratic values (Suhardin et al., 2025; Iswadi et al., 2025; Nurhakim et al., 2025). In this context, civic education has not been organized in the format of a subject that must be learned, but is seen as a continuous process whereby students are taught how to engage in social life meaningfully and also contribute responsibly to the community at large (Mau, 2024; Sarbaitinil et al., 2023; Abakah, 2023).

In spite of such a normative orientation, the actual practice of character and civic education in most of the schools has often been shallow and narrow (Afandi et al., 2026; Azmi et al., 2025).

Formal education and control systems tend to impart moral values, though, students are seldom given protracted chances to practice and exercise these values in realistic social situations (Zhang & Derakhshan, 2025; Obiagu, 2023; Alamsyah, 2025). The learning activities are more inclined to cognitive achievement and performance in examination and thus provide little opportunity to the reflective discourse, problem-solving in groups and ethical considerations. As a result of this, civic learning may often bring about compliance in specific situations but not moral dedication that is internalized. Students can be appropriate when they are under control but cannot transfer civic ideals into their personal practices.

The constraints have driven policy-makers and teaching professionals to seek other methods that are more sensitive to both the social and moral aspects of learning (La Sala et al., 2025; Mouta et al., 2025; Kumar, 2023). The adoption of Merdeka Curriculum is a major attempt to shift education towards the holistic and student-centered development. The key reform in this area is the Pancasila Student Profile Project which aims to enhance character by using interdisciplinary, project-based and community-oriented learning (Elnurianda & Tamam, 2025; Assingkiy et al., 2025; Shofwan et al., 2026). The project is designed to shift civic education, which focuses on abstract learning, to experiential educational practice, by focusing on participation, contextual inquiry, and collective reflection (White et al., 2023; Bauml et al., 2023; Haduong et al., 2024).

Pedagogical direction of P5 project represents a larger change in perception regarding the way character is created (Nurislamiah et al., 2024; Nirmala et al., 2024; Al Farizza et al., 2025). Instead of taking the position that moral values should be passed on only by means of clarification, the project is based on the fact that ethical awareness is formed in the course of a long-term social interaction and practice. Students are challenged to explore authentic problems in the environment, agitate varied views, and take responsibility of collective results. These processes can ensure the inculcation of civic learning into the daily life practices that would shape the moral reasoning of students, their social sensitivity, and democratic disposition over time.

However, the application of P5 in Indonesian schools has shown a significant difference in both quality and effect (Muin et al., 2024; Andayani et al., 2025; Akhyar et al., 2024). Leadership commitment, institutional readiness, teacher competence, and resource availability differences are the aspects that affect the interpretation of the project and its implementation in the practice. P5 in certain contexts is an evolving learning and civic space of ethics; in others, it is appropriated into procedural processes with the main goal of meeting administrative demands (Nurislamiah et al., 2024; Umayah, 2024; Amiruddin et al., 2024). These differences imply that the success of character education reform relies not just on the formulation of the policy but also on the organizational and cultural contexts, which mediate educational practice.

Another aspect which defines civic learning in Indonesia is the influence of the local wisdom in making moral and identity (Mulyana, 2024; Latief & Rahman., 2025; Dartini et al., 2025). The practices of community traditions that adopt cultural values give interpretation systems that enable the students to learn about social responsibility, reciprocal respect, and group identity. In the event that civic education is no longer tied to these cultural abstractions, it may become abstract and disassociated with the experiences of students. On the other hand, character education will be emotionally resonant and socially relevant when the national ideals are combined with the local ethical tradition (Obizue et al., 2025; Fernández Espinosa & Domingo, 2025; Nguyen, 2024). Such an integration allows students to get a sense of civic values as something that they are not being told to do but as something significant to their social self.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in P5 and character education in recent years, the existing research has been biased towards policy analysis, a description of P5 programs, or the short-term effects (Joulaei et al., 2025; Chotimah et al., 2025; The more detailed focus on how the civic character of students grows has been relatively low through the systematic involvement in project based learning. In addition, very little literature has explored the relationship between local wisdom and institutional practice to form moral agency and civic identity. This disjunct limits our perception of the formation of character as a socially inserted and culture mediated process (Souza et al., 2025).

To close this gap, the current research analyses the structure of the Pancasila Student Profile Project implementation in SMIP Universitas Simalungun in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. It questions the way project-based civic learning is organized, arranged, and experienced by the school administration and instructors and how it will help the students to develop their civic character. Specific focus is placed on the adoption of the Simalungun local wisdom as a cultural basis in gaining ethical learning and social involvement.

This study will attempt to embrace the complexity of the character formation process as it transpires in daily institutional practice and interpersonal interactions by employing the qualitative approach. The study will aim at shedding light on the process through which civic values are negotiated, enacted and internalized across periods by conducting extensive exploration into perspectives and experiences of the participants. The results are supposed to add to the current scholarly debates regarding civic education reform, the development of character, and culturally responsive pedagogy in Indonesia and similar education settings.

Methods

This research used a qualitative investigation that aimed at explaining how Pancasila Student Profile Project was implemented in the daily educational activities and the role the project plays in developing civic character of the students within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The research did not focus on quantification of pre-determined variables, rather the most important part of the study was the investigation into meanings, experiences, and interpretations as constructed by educators in the context of natural school. This methodological approach was used to attempt to document the complex nature of these processes of education occurring in the real institutional settings influenced by sociocultural and organizational processes.

This research was based in SMIP Universitas Simalungun at Pematangsiantar in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The current institution was specifically selected due to its regular adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum and incorporation of the Pancasila Student Profile Project into the fundamental pedagogical programmes of this institution. The character education and project-based learning were the institutional commitment of the school which provided a fertile background of exploring the transfer of civic values into concrete pedagogical practices. In addition, the local socio-cultural environment, which was marked by strong local culture and community values, also offered a much-needed perspective in understanding the form in which national educational policies were construed in the local context.

Sampling was done through purposive sampling to make sure that the information collected was based on people who were directly involved in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the Pancasila Student Profile Project. The number of informants that participated in the research was 15 participants including one principal, three vice principals, and 11 teachers who attended different subject areas. These participants were not selected based on the formal rank only, but rather based on the grounds of active participation in the activities of curriculum implementation and character education. Their diverse nature in roles enabled them to capture

various views on institutional leadership, instructional practices as well as classroom level experiences.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, systematic observations and documentary analysis. Semi-structured interviews were applied to provide participants with the leeway to present experiential narrations, develop cogitations, and exude pedagogical thought processes in their own words. The interviews were carried out in a flexible and dialogic manner allowing the researcher to pursue emerging themes whilst ensuring that the broad research objectives were not lost. Classroom teaching and project work were observed on the basis of which the execution of civic values in everyday teacher-student interaction was analysed. These observations were made on formal learning activities as well as informal activities that point to attitude, cooperation, responsibility, and participation of students. And to provide contextual and administrative comments of the implementation process, relevant institutional documents such as lesson plans, project reports, school regulations, and learning guidelines were also analyzed to provide the insights.

The analysis process was both iterative and reflexive. After conducting verbatim transcription of all the interviews, the researcher undertook the process of repeated readings in order to generate a holistic understanding of the narratives and institutional practices of the participants. The first coding was then used to identify salient patterns in relation to civic character development, instructional strategies, organisational support, and student engagement. These initial codes were continually perfected by constant comparison between sources of data, providing more comprehensive categories of analysis. The enduring interpretation and theoretical consideration has enabled the incorporation of these categories in thematic constructions to explain how the Pancasila Student Profile Project functions as a channel through which civic education is being provided in a school setting.

Results and Discussion

Students' Civic Character Prior to the Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Project

The results of the Pancasila Student Profile Project developed based on this paper suggest that the civic character of students in SMIP Universitas Simalungun was poorly developed and incoherent before they went through the Pancasila Student Profile Project. Even though moral and civic values had been formally included in a number of subjects, their pedagogical fulfillment was more focused on the delivery of knowledge than internalisation of characters. Therefore, civic education was rather a mental activity where students were supposed to memorize normative principles and they were not given enough time to exercise and apply the values of these principles in the context of meaningful social settings.

The above-mentioned condition was always defined by teachers as some sort of symbolic character education. According to one of the senior teachers, the character related issues were constantly discussed in the classroom, but made very little difference to the day-to-day behaviour of the students. She stated,

“Students could explain what discipline, honesty, and responsibility meant, but these ideas often stopped at the level of theory. In daily practice, many still ignored rules and avoided collective duties” (T3).

This statement reflects a fundamental gap between moral knowledge and moral action, suggesting that civic learning had not yet reached the level of personal commitment and ethical awareness.

Another teacher emphasized that students' behavioral compliance was largely dependent on external control. He noted,

“When teachers were present, students behaved well. When supervision was reduced, many returned to old habits. It showed that discipline was still imposed from outside, not built from inside” (T7).

Such observation indicates that civic behaviour of students was influenced by fear of being punished rather than the internalised moral conviction. This situation is a sign of a poor civic disposition, where obedience is contingent and weak as opposed to strong and stable.

These views were also supported by classroom observations. In the initial phases of gathering data, the learning processes were defined by an imbalanced involvement and poor social interaction. During group discussions, few students were vocal and dependent as few expressed their opinion. Projects could often be done by the same people and little input by the less confident students. Group members in a number of cases did not exhibit much sense of shared responsibility and leaving unfinished work to others without regrets.

Such trends imply that democratic attendance, shared responsibility and shared problem solving was not yet a part of the learning culture among the students. Rather, there was a hierarchical and passive learning tradition that was involved in classroom interactions whereby students were used to being directed on things but not to negotiating ideas. As a result, there were still few possibilities to build civic skills like dialogue, tolerance, and social initiative.

Moreover, the fact that students were not actively involved in the civic life was also reflected in their reaction to the social activities in schools. The extracurricular programmes and community-related programmes that were observed indicated that most students were only participating in these activities to satisfy the formal requirements. They were not always emotionally involved and thought provoking of the social meaning behind these activities. This tendency signifies the fact that it was not yet the internalised civic participation as a moral responsibility, but it was seen as an institutional obligation.

School leaders admitted that this condition was also partly determined by the former practices of curricula that focused on academic success and achievements on examination. One of the vice-principals said that, according to the pre-Merdeka Curriculum, teachers felt like being under intense pressure to cover syllabi and get students ready to take standardised examinations. This led to character education being more often than not marginalised and regarded as a secondary issue. This institutional setting restricted the pedagogical field of teachers to test the experimental and reflective civic learning.

The blending of the instructional routines, assessment-based pressures, and lack of the opportunity to engage in experiential learning led to the development of what could be termed, passive citizenship by the students. They had general understanding on the civic norm, but were not confident, motivated, and ethically sensitive enough to implement these norms on their own. The ideals of civic values were not interpreted as social practices but as abstract values.

Analytically, this situation demonstrates one of the structural flaws of traditional methods of character education. Civic learning becomes unsuccessful when it is confined to verbal teaching and moral preaching, as it does not provide the emotional and social aspects of moral development. Students can learn moral words, but they do not have a connection with their implications in the real world. As a result, the development of the character becomes shallow and erratic.

Education teachers and leaders slowly realized that such trend was not in a position to support the long-term educational mission of the school. They came to the realization that civic character building could not occur without significant learning environments that enabled students to be exposed to the sense of responsibility, cooperation, and making ethical decisions first hand. One teacher said that moral lessons, in the absence of a real-life practice, were just empty words and easily forgotten.

This awareness as a collective was the source of institutional change. The perceived gap between moral knowledge and moral behaviour had inspired the school to find a more holistic and participatory approach to civic education. In this regard, the Pancasila Student Profile Project did not just appear as a policy requirement, but rather as a pedagogical reaction to some long-standing drawbacks inherent in past character-education practices.

The pre-implementation status of the civic character of students may be interpreted as the intermediate phase when there was the moral awareness but lacked moral agency. It was an issue of students being aware of what they were supposed to do but not having experiential, emotional measure as well as reflective tools to conceptualize such expectations into concurrent behaviour. The situation depicted in this condition underscores the need of project-based civic learning as a channel of closing the gap between ethical knowledge and ethical behavior.

Institutional Transformation and Commitment to Civic Character Formation

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a significant change in the practice of civic education in the institution. Other than viewing the Pancasila Student Profile Project as an auxiliary program, school leadership foreshadowed the project as the main character formation program. This plan of repositioning also transformed the organizational culture, pedagogical priorities, and forms of professional collaboration.

This commitment was explained by the principal in interviews, as the character education should form the identities of pupils and should not just comply with the bureaucratic prescriptions. He elucidated,

“Our goal is not to produce students who only know civic values, but students who live those values in their attitudes and decisions” (P1).

This vision was operationalized through systematic planning, regular evaluation meetings, and intensive teacher coordination.

Vice principals played a crucial role in translating this vision into daily practice. One vice principal explained that continuous dialogue with teachers was essential to ensure program coherence and sustainability. He stated,

“We discuss difficulties openly. If teachers face obstacles, we work together to find solutions” (VP2).

This partnership approach to leadership created a shared sense of responsibility and professional ownership among teachers.

A review of the institutional documents illustrates that the school has created detailed project models, assessment rubrics as well as reflective reporting systems. These relics served not only as a kind of administrative tool, but as a kind of a pedagogical manual, further cementing the role of civic character formation. It is at this institutional infrastructure that the national policy was effectively localized inside the school social cultural milieu.

Pedagogical Reorientation through Project Based Civic Learning

The institutionalization of Pancasila Student Profile Project at the classroom level resulted in a major reorientation of the pedagogical practices. Teachers gradually moved away on a content-focused paradigm of instruction, towards learning designs that pre-empted inquiry, collaboration, and social interaction. Civic education, in turn, was no longer an abstract field but was incorporated directly, as part of the project based activities, which touched on real community issues.

This transformation was explained by a social studies teacher in the form of pedagogical learning. She said that when students explored environmental issues around the school, they started to feel that responsibility is a lived, but not just theoretical phenomenon. She stated,

“When they clean the environment and see the impact, they realize that civic duty is real, not just words” (T5).

Similarly, a language teacher emphasized that reflective writing enabled students to critically examine their own behavior. She noted,

“Through reflection, students start questioning themselves. They become more aware of how they treat others” (T9).

It was observed that the project activities were well structured based on the principle of cooperative learning. The participants operated in small groups, which implied that they switched leadership roles, and it was necessary to organize the work, eliminate the conflict, and coordinate the group performance. In one of the waste-management projects observed, students independently coordinated the data collection, made informational posters, and peer evaluation. These were practiced with the goal of promoting democratic participation, ethical responsibility, and respect.

Notably, a teacher always placed learning in the cultural context of students. The local traditions, community values, and existing social reality were connected with the projects. This situational learning not only made students more emotionally involved but also increased their moral understanding, which made civic education meaningful personally and socially.

Students’ Moral Awareness and Civic Transformation

The long term practice of project based learning systematically developed civic dispositions of students. Empirical reports revealed that there were great improvements in the self-confidence of students, social sensitivity and moral responsibility. These changes were evolving in the form of getting repeated cycles of action, reflection, and interaction, and not in the form of a one-time event.

One of the instructors also noted that students who started out with a passive attitude shifted to more assertive and communicative competence as time went on. She remarked,

“Now they dare to speak, even if their opinions are different. They learn that every voice matters” (T2).

Another teacher highlighted changes in students’ work ethic. He explained,

“They no longer wait to be told. When there is work to do, they take initiative” (T11).

The reflective journals made by students provided abundant empirical data in favor of this change. Several of these entries were a record of learning patience, empathetic, and cooperative skills. A student observed that in the past, I was only concerned about doing my job. Now I question whether my fellow-students will also be able to achieve it (Student Reflection,

Document 4). One more entry explained that being involved in community projects helped to get a broader perception of social responsibility outside of the institutional scope.

These stories were supported by observational data. In the later stages implementation, the students displayed improved emotional control, positive conflict resolution, and support of peers. They were found to be more willing to listen carefully to divergent opinions and negotiating differences in a respectful way. These actions indicated that the civic values were internalized in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels.

Structural and Pedagogical Challenges in Program Implementation

Alongside these positive results, the process of implementation was marked with unrelenting structural and pedagogical issues. The issue of time-constrain and overloaded curriculum seemed to be a concern of teachers often. This constant negotiation and adaptation was necessary to integrate project activities with examination-oriented content.

A single teacher stated that the lack of time in teaching usually limited the scope of civic inquiry. She stated,

“Sometimes we have to choose between finishing the syllabus and guiding students in projects. Both are important, but time is limited” (T6).

A different teacher indicated unequal student participation. He noted that there were still students who were still reliant on more active students, hence they require further scaffolding and mentoring.

Some resources were also limited limiting the execution of the projects. Some teachers also indicated that they have problems accessing online resources and community resources. However, these limitations ensured innovative problem-solving and enhanced teamwork. School leaders viewed them as institutional learning process. One of the vice-principals stated that end-semester reflective reviews have helped promote constant improvement (VP1).

Local Wisdom as a Moral Foundation for Civic Education

The main difference of the current research is that there has been a systematic way of applying Simalungun local wisdom to civic learning processes. Teachers strategically had used cultural values like honesty, solidarity and communal accountability as ethical basis of project activities. These values acted as moral points of reference that connected national civic values to the experiences of the students.

According to one of the teachers, introducing Habanaron Do Bona helped students to comprehend that integrity should be a social responsibility and not an individual desire.

“They learn that honesty is not only about themselves, but about protecting community trust” (T8).

The other educator stressed that community-related projects helped students to see how collaboration works in real social situations (T10).

The projects which involved cultural show, community service, and local entrepreneurship were able to establish effective interactions among students and community members. During one of the projects in a cultural festival, it was observed that students had no hesitation in explaining their work to parents and the local leadership and this showed that they were proud of their city and had respect towards other cultures. These engagements enhanced belongingness and social identity of the students.

Local wisdom served as a mediator between the state-centered civic education and the traditions of moral values, which were based on the community through this integration. The synthesis made the character formation more authentic, sustainable and ethical.

The insufficient cultivation of the civic character of students before the introduction of the Pancasila Student Profile Project is indicative of more general pedagogical tendencies that place civic education more of a cognitive venture. Classroom teaching presented moral concepts, but students were hardly motivated to practice these ideals through prolonged socialization. Civic learning was therefore more likely to lead to compliance, which was influenced by supervision and not nine-ethical commitment that was based on individual reflection. Accounts of similar trends are presented by Nurmala et al. (2025), who note that character education fails to perform its work responsibilities when it is not related to the everyday activities and community participation. According to their findings, moral internalization must be reinforced on a regular basis by the means of lived interaction a condition that has not been dominant during the pre-implementation stage witnessed in the current study.

This methodological constraint is strongly associated with institutional forces that influence the teaching decisions of teachers. Khotrunada and Widiyanah (2024) stress that the successful implementation of the P5 model should be based on consistent organizational planning and systematic monitoring. Character education tends to be disjointed and is symbolic in environments that have weak such structures. This argument is supported by the current findings that have shown that the previous civic teaching at SMIP Universitas did not have stable coordination mechanisms and thus constrained the ability of teachers to create integrated learning experiences. As a result, civic character making was not an individualized result but an institutional problem that lay in leadership practices and administrative priorities.

Fauzan et al. (2023) in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum think of the educational reform as the attempt of facilitating the holistic student development based on the flexible and participatory learning. They claim that the change of curriculum is still on the surface level when teachers are confined by strict requirements of the assessment and have no room of collaboration. This opinion can be supported by the experiences described in this study. Once there was more institutional support and collaboration between teachers became a habitual practice, teachers could redesign learning activities that connected academic content with social responsibility. The P5 model, in such a way, played a mediating role in terms of which ideals of the curriculum were converted into the classroom activities.

The instructional change that is evident in the current research is consistent with findings in the empirical studies on project-based civic learning. Maharani et al. (2024) show that inquiry-based projects boost civic knowledge and analytical skills because they are based on critical thinking of social problems by students. Even though their study takes a quantitative design the qualitative patterns established in this study provides complementary processes. Confidence in the ability to express an opinion and negotiate group decisions grew among the students who repeatedly participated in project activities. The development of cognition and the sense of morality thus developed in a reinforcing manner.

The factor of responsibility became one of the key aspects of this change. Amanda (2024) adds that the development of responsibility occurs in the situation of learning that implies accountability to the audience and involvement by the role. Her results show that students get more committed in ethics when they feel the social impact of their behaviors. The current research goes further to explore how these leadership rotation and peer appraisal practices

contributed towards the development of a sense of collective responsibility. The person was responsible not because he was exhorted but because he participated in communal work.

The gradual advancement of the character growth observed in the present study corresponds to the staged implementation model that was suggested by Romandon and Jatiningsih (2025). Through their research, they have proven that civic learning is developed in cycles of planning, action, reflection and revision. Similar trends were also observed in the present situation, according to which, the civic dispositions of students were developed through long-term and not immediate intervention. This long-term feature emphasizes the need of continuity and institutional persistence in the sphere of character education.

The contextual relevance also had a significant effect on the outcomes of learning. In their argument, Rahman et al. (2024) propose that the P5 unit can only be significant when the projects are established within the milieu of the sociocultural background of the students and supported by the adequate resources. Their outline of infrastructural and technological limitations reflect the challenges highlighted in this paper. The lack of resources did not only lead to lowered instructional effectiveness but also reduced the level of agency and public responsibility that learners could practice. Avenues of ethical consideration were also reduced when projects degenerated to procedural activities.

Temporal allocation also emerged as another structural predictor of civic learning. Yustina et al. (2024) argue that curricular overload limits the possibilities of moral thinking and social dialogues. This statement is supported by the existing findings that reflect the challenges of teachers in balancing the academic goals with the experience-based learning. Such tension highlights the urgency of reconsidering assessment practices and prioritizing schedules at the policy-level in case the character education is considered a substantive educational goal.

An interesting insight into this investigation has been the analysis of local wisdom as a medium of civic learning. Yusuf et al. (2024) give evidence that culturally based character education supplements emotional appeals and social significance. Their integrative approach that involves families and communities reflects the integrative practices that have been found in this study. Through the internalization of Simalungun values, civic learning achieved relational values based on the common traditions.

The aspects of culture are also illuminated by the work of Khodijah and Surawan (2025) who show that local wisdom strengthens moral resilience of the digital age. They postulate that cultural identity provides moral guidance in the face of rapid social change. The assimilation of culture in the current study seemed to stabilize civic identity of students by combining national values and familiar moral narratives. The ethical obligations were therefore seen as an internalized social obligation and not imposed.

Prasetya and Nurhidayati (2025) suggest institutionalizing the integration of local wisdom through modules of curriculum that aligns the objectives, content and assessment. Their results highlight the importance of systematic design in maintaining character education. The fact that internal guidelines and documentation at SMIP Universitas Simalungan shows an inception of the foundation of such alignment, yet further polishing is mandatory.

The environmental-related projects were also useful in improving civic education because social responsibility became tangible. As portrayed by Andayani (2025), collective awareness is created by sustainable lifestyle themes by acting through experience. Tiyani (2024) also highlights how routine practices can be used to support moral habits. The environmental project activities in this study allowed the students to see vivid effects of the collective action and therefore cemented accountability and collaboration.

Management in institutions became a very important facilitating factor. Rafsanjani (2026) discovers that coordinated planning and assessment have a great impact on character outcomes. The current results build on this evidence by demonstrating that pedagogical coherence was facilitated by leadership meetings, reflective reviews and shared documentation. The formation of civic character was directed by the organizational processes that were not confined to single classrooms.

Such structural barriers as a lack of parental engagement and the lack of pedagogical innovation, which Ramadhan (2026) identifies, were also observable in this situation. This culture of collaboration that is established in SMIP Universitas Simalungun may be viewed as a reaction to these limitations. Decentralizing authority among the actors in the institutions enabled the school to mitigate dependence on solitary teaching actions and reinforce its moral learning environment.

The concept of P5 presented by Ardiansyah (2023) envisions a learning environment as a participatory process where the meaning is created through the lived experience and involvement of the stakeholders. The view is very closely related to the current results that underline the key role of interaction between students, teachers and community members. The development of civic character was a process of consolidation and not on one-hand training.

It is argued in the discussion that, under the Merdeka Curriculum, civic education is viewed as a process of social situatedness that is institutionally designed, practice-based, and shaped by the cultural context. P5 was not a technical tool, but the model that restructured learning with the focus on participation, reflections, and moral conversation. The process helped the students to create forms of agency, responsibility and identity, which went beyond the expectations of formal curricula.

This insight presents another question of how other learning ecologies can be created in different learning environments. The focus on leadership practices, teacher collaboration, cultural integration, and reflective routines can offer some useful information to reinforce civic education in Indonesia and similar settings.

Conclusion

The current study indicates that cultivating civic character of students in the context of Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the integration of civic material, but also on the reorganization of learning experiences that provide students with a chance to be responsible, dialogical, and involved in making decisions in significant social situations. Before the introduction of the Pancasila Student Profile Project, civic education in SMIP Universitas Simalungun was still rather theoretical and reliant on supervision. The project-based civic learning which was initiated on the basis of institutional coordination and reflective assessment redefined the engagement of the students with moral values gradually. The model of civic character was demonstrated through the enduring engagement in teamwork, contextual problem-solving and systematic reflection, as compared to moral education. Local wisdom helped in this process further as it instilled national civic ideals in culturally familiar ethical traditions. When the civic values were viewed in terms of Simalungun principles, students conceived them as social commitments (not as abstract obligations). These results imply that successful civic education with the Merdeka Curriculum requires institutional design, participatory learning, and culturally based learning models. Further studies might focus on how similar structures can be scaled to various parts and levels of education to further instill the development of democratic and ethically responsible citizens.

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