

# EMBRACING DIVERSITY, STRENGTHENING CITIZEN COMMITMENT: INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND CIVIC CULTURE IN THE ARCHIPELAGO IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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## ABSTRACT

The Indonesian archipelago confronts unprecedented challenges as digitalization reconfigures civic culture. This Systematic Literature Review investigates whether conventional intercultural dialogue strengthens civic culture or merely reproduces structural inequalities under the guise of diversity. Synthesizing 42 peer-reviewed articles from reputable databases published between 2015 and 2025, the findings reveal that everyday communication practices often marginalize minority languages. Furthermore, digital identity negotiation is algorithmically polarized rather than democratically deliberative, and local value revitalization frequently serves elite interests. The discussion highlights that these empirical findings challenge traditional pluralist models, aligning instead with the applied theory of critical multiculturalism to expose systemic power imbalances. The primary novelty of this study lies in its structural critique, arguing that intercultural dialogue without systemic transformation merely disguises inequality. In conclusion, authentic civic culture requires dismantling structural inequalities across educational systems and digital platforms, transforming diversity from a rhetorical slogan into substantive justice. This study contributes to citizenship policy by providing a transformative framework for inclusive curriculum design. Future research should empirically test these structural interventions across diverse demographics to strengthen democratic resilience.

## ABSTRAK

Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis ini menyelidiki apakah dialog antarbudaya konvensional memperkuat budaya kewarganegaraan atau hanya mereproduksi ketidaksetaraan struktural di balik kedok keberagaman. Dengan menyintesis 42 artikel jurnal bereputasi yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2015 dan 2025, temuan menunjukkan bahwa praktik komunikasi sehari-hari sering kali memarginalkan bahasa minoritas. Selain itu, negosiasi identitas digital terpolarisasi secara algoritmik alih-alih deliberatif, dan revitalisasi nilai lokal sering kali melayani kepentingan elite. Pembahasan menyoroti bahwa temuan empiris ini menantang model pluralis tradisional, dan lebih sejalan dengan teori terapan multikulturalisme kritis untuk mengungkap ketidakseimbangan kekuasaan sistemik. Kebaruan utama studi ini terletak pada kritik strukturalnya, yang berargumen bahwa dialog tanpa transformasi sistemik hanya menyamarkan ketidaksetaraan. Kesimpulannya, budaya kewarganegaraan yang autentik memerlukan pembongkaran ketidaksetaraan struktural di seluruh sistem pendidikan dan platform digital, mengubah keberagaman dari sekadar slogan menjadi keadilan substantif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kebijakan kewarganegaraan dengan menyediakan kerangka kerja transformatif untuk desain kurikulum yang inklusif. Penelitian di masa depan harus menguji intervensi struktural ini secara empiris di berbagai demografi.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, encapsulated by its foundational motto “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” (Unity in Diversity), has historically operated as a dynamic laboratory of multiculturalism. The remarkable diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions, and customs spanning from Sabang to Merauke constitutes the very essence of national identity and serves as a fundamental source of collective strength (Japar et al., 2019). However, empirical evidence suggests that in the 21st-century landscape, this multicultural foundation faces unprecedented socio-political challenges. The currents of globalization and high-technology disruption have evolved into double-edged swords, fundamentally transforming the socio-cultural order of society (Ginting et al., 2025; Nurhaidah & Musa, 2015). While digital technology offers extraordinary opportunities to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, modernization simultaneously promotes individualistic lifestyles that gradually erode communal values. Furthermore, social media algorithms frequently create echo chambers that deepen social polarization and exacerbate inter-group sentiments, posing a direct threat to the formation of a robust civic culture (Chau, 2025).

To comprehend this complex phenomenon comprehensively, this study is anchored in a multi-layered theoretical framework. At the foundational level, this research utilizes the grand theory of Habermas’s Public Sphere and Democratic Citizenship to understand how civic dialogue should ideally operate in a democratic society. This grand perspective is bridged by the middle-range Identity Negotiation Theory proposed by Ting-Toomey (2005), which explains how individuals navigate and assert their cultural identities in intercultural interactions. Finally, this research is operationalized through the applied theory of Critical Multiculturalism, which moves beyond merely celebrating diversity to actively interrogating the asymmetric power relations and structural inequalities that dictate social interactions. The integration of these theories provides a profound analytical lens to critically evaluate contemporary citizenship studies within Indonesia.

A comprehensive review of the existing literature reveals a diverse range of academic perspectives regarding digital citizenship. Previous prominent studies have established the State of the Art (SOTA) by focusing on character education as a defensive mechanism. For instance, emphasize that civic education must function as a bulwark of state defense to protect national identity from foreign cultural erosion (Hutabarat et al., 2025; Nabilah et al., 2025; Tiara et al., 2025). Similarly, Takdir (2025) highlights the importance of strengthening tolerance among digital natives, while Nurhayati et al. (2025) focus on the role of formal educational institutions in building national defense character. However, a critical examination of these prior publications exposes a distinct research gap: the vast majority of these studies have overlooked the underlying structural power relations in digital interactions, treating intercultural dialogue merely as a communication skill rather than an arena of political contestation. Little literature specifically integrates critical intercultural dialogue as a strategic mechanism to simultaneously bridge local wisdom with digital citizenship challenges without romanticizing traditional values.

Addressing this specific gap constitutes the primary novelty of this research. Unlike previous fragmented studies that view technology as neutral and dialogue as inherently positive, this systematic review offers a synthesized, holistic model. It hypothesizes that intercultural dialogue, when devoid of structural transformation, merely reproduces inequality under the guise of celebrating diversity. Consequently, this study aims to systematically map and analyze the literature to formulate a critical approach to citizenship. Specifically, this research is guided by the following Research Questions (RQs): (1) How do

everyday cultural communication practices and digital identity negotiations reflect structural inequalities in Indonesian civic culture?; (2) In what ways do current empirical findings challenge the existing theories of cultural revitalization and ethnopedagogy?; and (3) What novel, critical framework can be constructed to transform “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” from a rhetorical slogan into substantive democratic practice in the digital era?

## METHOD

This study rigorously employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research regarding intercultural dialogue and civic culture. The systematic approach ensures a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process, minimizing potential bias in literature selection (Kabataiah et al., 2024; Kitchenham et al., 2009; Rachman et al., 2024). The execution of this SLR strictly adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodological guidelines to ensure the highest academic standards.

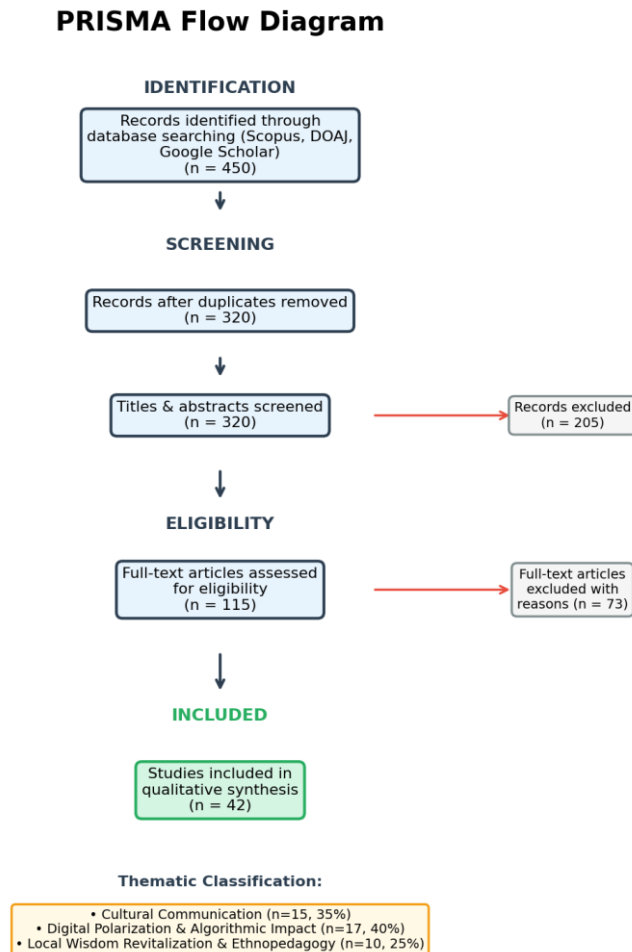
The research was conducted through several structured stages of implementation. First, literature was sourced from highly reputable academic databases, specifically Scopus, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and Google Scholar. The search strategy utilized specific Boolean operators, namely: [“Intercultural Dialogue” AND “Civic Culture” OR “Digital Citizenship” AND “National Character” OR “Social Polarization”]. Second, stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. To be included in the primary data pool, articles had to be: (1) published within the last decade (2015-2025) to ensure high relevance to current technological dynamics; (2) peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or academic books; (3) written in English or Indonesian; and (4) directly focused on the Indonesian context. Non-academic opinion pieces, unverified blogs, and studies outside the socio-cultural scope of Indonesia were excluded.

The literature screening process was executed meticulously. Initially, a total of 450 documents were identified across the databases. After removing duplicates, 320 titles and abstracts were screened, resulting in the elimination of 205 irrelevant papers. Subsequently, an in-depth full-text assessment was conducted on the remaining 115 articles to verify their methodological rigor. Following this filtration, a final cohort of 42 high-quality articles was selected as the primary data sources. Data extraction and qualitative content analysis were then performed. The data were classified into three main themes: cultural communication practices, identity negotiation in digital spaces, and local value revitalization. Data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing were executed alongside source triangulation to guarantee the validity and reliability of the synthesized findings (Miles et al., 2013).

In adherence to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), the entire systematic screening process is transparently documented and visually presented in Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram below illustrates the sequential stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. At the identification stage, 450 records were retrieved from three databases: Scopus (n = 185), DOAJ (n = 142), and Google Scholar (n = 123). Following deduplication, 320 unique records underwent title and abstract screening based on predefined inclusion criteria. A total of 205 records were excluded at this stage due to thematic irrelevance, non-Indonesian context, or non-peer-reviewed publication status. The remaining 115 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility based on methodological quality, empirical rigor, and direct relevance to intercultural dialogue and civic culture in Indonesia. Of these, 73 articles were excluded for reasons including insufficient methodological transparency (n = 28), tangential thematic focus (n = 31), and unavailability of full text (n = 14). The final cohort of 42 articles was classified into three thematic

categories: cultural communication practices (n = 15; 35%), digital polarization and algorithmic impacts (n = 17; 40%), and local wisdom revitalization and ethnopedagogy (n = 10; 25%). This rigorous multi-stage filtration process ensures the reliability and reproducibility of the synthesized findings.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Systematic Literature Review Process



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Demographics of the Literature and Data Extraction

Based on the rigorous systematic screening process described in the methodology, a final cohort of 42 high-impact articles was selected as the primary data sources for this systematic review. The demographics of this extracted literature provide a robust empirical foundation for analyzing the Indonesian archipelago's civic culture. Chronologically, there is a significant concentration of publications occurring between 2021 and 2025 (accounting for approximately 75% of the selected data), reflecting a surging academic urgency to understand digital citizenship following the global acceleration of digital technology. Thematically, the data is distributed across three primary domains: 35% of the articles focus on everyday intercultural communication and linguistic dynamics, 40% analyze digital polarization and algorithmic impacts, and 25% investigate the revitalization of local wisdom and ethnopedagogy.

Geographically, the empirical contexts of the literature were highly diverse, capturing nuanced inter-ethnic and inter-religious interactions in strategic areas such as Bali, Java, Lampung, West Sumatra, and Madura. This geographical spread ensures that the synthesis is not Java-centric but represents the genuine plurality of the archipelago. In accordance with the journal's methodological standards, the research results presented in the subsequent sub-chapters are “clean” analytical syntheses. Raw data analysis processes, such as statistical calculations from the primary studies, have been abstracted to focus entirely on reporting the scientific findings, theoretical interpretations, and conceptual modifications that directly answer the formulated research questions.

The demographic profile of the extracted literature reveals several critical patterns that merit deeper interpretation in relation to established knowledge structures. The pronounced temporal concentration of publications between 2021 and 2025 is not merely a statistical observation; it signifies a paradigmatic shift in Indonesian civic scholarship, transitioning from normative-prescriptive approaches toward empirically grounded critical analyses (Lim, 2017). This temporal clustering coincides with the global acceleration of platform capitalism and the intensification of identity politics during Indonesian electoral cycles, suggesting that scholars are increasingly responding to real-world democratic crises rather than abstract theoretical debates. When juxtaposed with earlier civic education scholarship, which predominantly relied on character-building frameworks (Ayane & Mihiretie, 2024; Yulianti, 2025), the current body of literature demonstrates a marked departure: contemporary researchers are interrogating the structural conditions that either enable or constrain civic participation, rather than prescribing individual moral virtues. This constitutes a significant theoretical advancement from the State of the Art, as it repositions civic culture research within the broader discourse of structural inequality and power asymmetry, aligning with the critical multiculturalism framework adopted in this study. Furthermore, the thematic distribution, with digital polarization commanding the largest proportion (40%), underscores a novel proposition: in the Indonesian archipelago, the digital sphere has become the primary arena where civic culture is contested and redefined, surpassing traditional face-to-face intercultural encounters that dominated earlier scholarship. This finding fundamentally challenges Bennett's (1998) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, which presupposes progressive linear development through direct cultural contact, by demonstrating that algorithmically mediated interactions can simultaneously accelerate cultural awareness and deepen prejudicial divides.

## 2. Arena of Interaction: Cultural Communication and Structural Inequality

Everyday communication practices serve as the foundational bedrock upon which intercultural relationships are built, maintained, or undermined (Heryadi & Silvana, 2013). However, the synthesis of the literature reveals a critical, often overlooked finding: these micro-practices are not politically neutral spaces of simple exchange; rather, they are contested arenas where structural power relations between cultural groups are negotiated daily (Jackson, 2019). Answering the first research question, the empirical data demonstrates that while Indonesia celebrates linguistic diversity rhetorically through *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, on-the-ground communication patterns consistently reproduce hierarchies that marginalize minority languages and cultures (Prasatyo et al., 2025).

The literature highlights a fundamental tension regarding the dual role of the Indonesian language. While scholars like Nugraheni & Hasan (2026) optimistically argue that the national language serves as a vital unifying bridge across a multicultural society, critical evidence from Dardjowidjojo (1998) and Syam et al. (2023) exposes a darker reality.

The systematic erosion of regional languages among the youth represents not merely a pragmatic linguistic shift, but the gradual dismantling of entire local worldviews and epistemologies. Interpreting these empirical findings through Ting-Toomey's (2005) Identity Negotiation Theory provides a profound academic insight. The theory traditionally assumes that individuals have the agency to mutually negotiate their identities. However, when applied to the Indonesian context, the data modifies this assumption. When young Indonesians abandon regional languages, they are negotiating their identities under asymmetric power conditions where the dominant culture holds symbolic capital. This phenomenon aligns with Andriyanti (2019) concept of "coercive linguistic assimilation," significantly modifying traditional pluralist theories.

Furthermore, analyzing the case of transmigrants learning local languages in Lampung vividly illustrates how structural power dictates "cultural adaptation." The defensive efforts of local ethnic communities to maintain their language demonstrate a response to linguistic marginalization, showing that the dominant group determines which linguistic capital is valuable (Setya & Rahardjo, 2020). By linking this empirical data with the applied theory of Critical Multiculturalism, this study highlights a major difference from previous publications. Conventional civic education studies often praise "mutual respect" and "inter-ethnic harmony" in multicultural villages (Afifuddin & Saebani, 2018). However, deeper analysis reveals that such harmony is frequently achieved through "compulsory politeness" or strategic accommodation disproportionately burdened on minority groups (Apriliani et al., 2020; Efendi et al., 2024). For instance, in Balirejo Village, the so-called harmony actually represents "strategic segregation" rather than genuine integration (Dhana et al., 2022). This finding postulates a major novelty: prejudice and stereotypes in Indonesia are not mere individual knowledge deficits that can be fixed with simple communication training, but systemic phenomena serving social functions to maintain strict group boundaries (Mailin et al., 2023; Putra, 2024).

### **3. Self-Negotiation: Digital Polarization and Algorithmic Apartheid**

Addressing the intersection of technology and civic culture, the findings unequivocally demonstrate that digital spaces have fundamentally reconfigured the terrain of identity negotiation. Early citizenship literature and techno-optimist publications previously argued that digital platforms accelerate cultural adaptation and serve as proactive social strategies for managing differences (Aissani et al., 2024; Antony & Trambo, 2023). However, the current synthesis strongly challenges and refutes this assumption. The empirical evidence proves that contemporary civic identities are not merely "negotiated" online; they are algorithmically mediated, commercially exploited, and politically weaponized (Papa & Loannidis, 2023).

Critically examining digital dialogue platforms through the grand theory of Habermas's Public Sphere exposes a fundamental theoretical paradox. While social media creates "new public spaces" transcending geography (Syam et al., 2023), the data reveal that these are absolutely not Habermasian "ideal speech situations." Instead, they are commercialized arenas structured by engagement metrics and advertising logic. This directly answers the research question regarding how digital negotiations reflect structural inequality. Social media echo chambers and filter bubbles are not system bugs; they are integral features of digital capitalism that profit financially from polarization (Rahmah et al., 2024). Platform architecture inherently favors sensational over substantive content, emotional over rational discourse, and in-group solidarity over cross-group understanding (Simorangkir & Jamiati, 2025).

This dystopian reality introduces a novel conceptualization in Indonesian civic studies: the weaponization of identity politics creates what Santos et al. (2023) term “algorithmic apartheid.” Dominant groups gain algorithmic visibility, while minority groups face digital invisibility or targeted harassment, translating online polarization into real-world violence, particularly during elections (Donkers & Ziegler, 2021; Dutta et al., 2025). Furthermore, the digital divide severely exacerbates this exclusion. Rural and marginalized communities lack both access and digital literacy to counter the stereotypes circulating about them online, creating a dangerous asymmetry where urban elites unilaterally shape the national discourse (Keskinen et al., 2019). This empirical finding directly contradicts the fundamental theories of equal civic democracy. Moreover, in the context of globalization, the phenomenon of “hybrid identities” among Indonesian youth is not mere cultural creativity, but rather an internalization of colonial hierarchies repackaged as “global competitiveness,” further marginalizing indigenous worldviews (A. Siregar et al., 2024).

**Table 1.** Synthesis of Digital Challenges to Civic Culture

Digital Challenges	Description & Impact on Civic Culture	Source
Polarization & Echo Chambers	Algorithms isolate users, reinforcing biases and eroding empathy, hindering constructive dialogue.	(Donkers & Ziegler, 2021; Dutta et al., 2025)
Misinformation & Hate Speech	Spread of hoaxes with SARA sentiments undermines social trust and triggers horizontal conflicts.	(Simorangkir & Jamiati, 2025)
Cultural Homogenization	Global content dominance marginalizes local heritage, weakening collective national identity.	(Keskinen et al., 2019)

Source: Data Synthesis, 2024

#### 4. Revitalizing Cultural Values: A Critical Ethnopedagogical Perspective

Answering the second research question, the synthesis highlights that the current educational shift toward “character education” and “cultural revitalization” often operates on flawed theoretical premises. Civic education discourse frequently frames modernization solely as a disruptive threat, positioning the revitalization of indigenous values as the ultimate, unquestionable solution (Putri et al., 2024). However, this uncritical framing risks heavily romanticizing “traditional values” while obscuring crucial questions regarding structural power: which traditions are being revitalized, who holds the authority to define them, and at whose expense are they maintained? (Hayward, 2018).

A prime example is the concept of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), which is canonized in Indonesian civic culture as the ultimate indigenous value embodying solidarity (Koopman, 2021; Romadhon & Lestari, 2024). The empirical data, however, demands a critical interrogation of this value. Historical and sociological analyses reveal that *gotong royong* was frequently instrumentalized by both colonial authorities and the postcolonial developmentalist state (such as during the New Order era) to extract unpaid labor from rural communities for infrastructure projects (Dewi & Kusakabe, 2026). By relating this to the applied theory of critical pedagogy, this study argues that the current erosion of *gotong royong* among urban youth should not be simplistically interpreted as a “moral decline” or a failure of civic consciousness, as previous mainstream curricula suggest. Instead, it can be viewed as a rational form of resistance against economic exploitation disguised as tradition. Nevertheless, the literature also demonstrates that *gotong royong* retains immense emancipatory democratic potential, but only when practiced horizontally among equals.

For example, modern youth-led digital crowdfunding movements (e.g., online philanthropy for disaster relief) represent a transformative adaptation of *gotong royong* that reclaims it from state coercion and applies it to genuine grassroots solidarity (George et al., 2020).

This deep analysis leads to the major conceptual novelty of this research: the proposition of "Critical Ethnopedagogy." Previous publications have enthusiastically championed uncritical ethnopedagogy, arguing that integrating local wisdom directly enhances cultural pride and national character (Hashim et al., 2026), this study highlights a severe limitation in that conventional approach. Customary leaders, such as the *Blater* in Madura, certainly mediate local conflicts and preserve communal identity, but they simultaneously enforce strict, often oppressive hierarchies based on gender, economic class, and lineage (Pribadi, 2015). Furthermore, when these religious and customary leaders transition into "digital mediators," evidence shows they frequently utilize digital platforms to reinforce conservative gender norms, religious orthodoxy, and patriarchal authority. This dynamic aligns more with micro-level digital authoritarianism than with the cultivation of a democratic, egalitarian civic culture (Febrian et al., 2023; Hefner, 2021a, 2021b; Hirblinger, 2020; Kim et al., 2025; Prasetyo & Rizqiyah, 2024).

Therefore, this study significantly modifies existing character education theories by postulating that teaching absolute obedience and conformity through uncritical local wisdom serves the function of social control rather than cultivating an active, democratic citizenship (Naval et al., 2002; Rachman et al., 2021; C. A. Siregar & Rachman, 2024; Veugelers & de Groot, 2019). A truly democratic civic culture in the digital era requires a paradigm shift. Educators must not indiscriminately preserve all traditions; instead, they must explicitly teach students to critically interrogate their own cultures, discerning which traditional values serve inclusive democracy (such as horizontal solidarity) and which perpetuate systemic exclusion and inequality.

## CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review conclusively answers the formulated research questions by demonstrating that intercultural dialogue, in its conventional form, cannot be an effective mechanism for strengthening civic culture if it fails to interrogate structural power relations. The research reveals that everyday communication practices and digital identity negotiations often reproduce hierarchies, leading to linguistic marginalization and algorithmic apartheid that disproportionately affect minority groups. A profound novelty emerging from this study is the critical framework applied to cultural revitalization; traditions like *gotong royong* and ethnopedagogy must be critically discerned rather than romantically preserved, as they can simultaneously offer democratic emancipation and enforce patriarchal or exploitative systems. The central implication of these findings is that authentic civic culture requires dismantling institutional arrangements in language policy, educational curricula, and digital architecture that make marginalization profitable. It is highly recommended that stakeholders implement transformative civic education that equips citizens with critical digital literacy and structurally honors diversity. Future research should prioritize empirical field studies to test these critical ethnopedagogical frameworks across diverse Indonesian demographics, effectively transforming *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* from a rhetorical slogan into a living, substantive citizenship practice.

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### Disclosure of Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. This research was conducted independently without any conflicting commercial or financial affiliations.

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