

Building Moral Awareness through Civic Education: An Analysis of Social-Emotional Characters in the Digital Age



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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has reshaped the moral landscape of young citizens, challenging traditional approaches to civic and moral education. This study explores how Civic Education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan*) can cultivate moral awareness through the integration of social-emotional character development in the digital era. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and literature-based analysis, the research synthesizes theoretical perspectives from moral philosophy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and digital citizenship frameworks. The findings reveal that moral awareness is not merely a cognitive competence but a multidimensional construct involving empathy, digital responsibility, and ethical reflection. Civic Education serves as a strategic platform for nurturing these dimensions by embedding digital ethics, emotional literacy, and community-based learning in classroom practices. The study also emphasizes the importance of character-based digital literacy to counter online disinformation, cyberbullying, and moral disengagement. In conclusion, the article proposes a transformative model of Civic Education that integrates moral awareness with socio-emotional intelligence, enabling learners to act responsibly and compassionately in digital society. This model contributes to the broader discourse on education for sustainable moral development and supports the realization of SDG 4.7 concerning global citizenship and sustainable values.

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Introduction

The moral fabric of society is undergoing profound transformation in the digital age, where the boundaries between the public and private spheres are increasingly blurred. The rise of social media, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic communication has created both opportunities and challenges for moral development, particularly among young citizens. The digital environment, characterized by immediacy, anonymity, and emotional intensification, often accelerates moral disengagement, cyber aggression, and polarization (Vallor, 2021; Greenfield, 2023). Within this context, moral awareness is no longer a static moral code but an adaptive process of ethical reflection and empathy that must be cultivated through deliberate education. Civic Education (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan*) thus emerges as a vital arena for re-establishing moral consciousness grounded in both rational and emotional dimensions. In the traditional paradigm, Civic Education was primarily directed toward the transmission of civic knowledge, values, and national identity. However, the current era demands a shift from normative instruction to transformative engagement, where students are not only taught what is right but also why and how to act rightly in diverse digital contexts (Arthur et al., 2022). This transformation aligns with the paradigm of social-emotional learning (SEL), which emphasizes the integration of emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation in moral reasoning. SEL provides a complementary framework to moral education by linking cognitive understanding with emotional and behavioral competencies (Jones et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating social-

emotional character education into Civic Education becomes a strategic pathway to foster moral awareness that is responsive to digital complexities.

The urgency of moral awareness in the digital era is evident in the growing phenomena of online disinformation, digital hate speech, and moral relativism. Youths often navigate ethical dilemmas in cyberspace without adequate moral compass or reflective guidance. As Noddings (2022) notes, the moral domain cannot be separated from care, relational sensitivity, and emotional attunement dimensions often neglected in conventional civic instruction. Hence, Civic Education must evolve to cultivate digital moral agency, enabling learners to exercise empathy and integrity within online interactions. This approach transforms moral education from a prescriptive doctrine into a participatory and dialogical practice that resonates with the lived experiences of digital citizens.

Moreover, the integration of character-based moral education supports the realization of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, which calls for education that promotes global citizenship and sustainable values. Building moral awareness through Civic Education aligns with this goal by nurturing ethical responsibility, digital literacy, and intercultural understanding (UNESCO, 2022). In Indonesia, this orientation resonates with the philosophical foundation of Pancasila, which emphasizes the unity of morality, humanity, and social justice. Embedding Pancasila-based ethics within the digital moral framework ensures that the development of civic consciousness is rooted in local wisdom while open to global ethical discourse (Suryadi & Ardiansyah, 2023).

At the philosophical level, moral awareness represents the convergence of cognition, affect, and volition dimensions that shape an individual's moral identity and civic responsibility (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2022). In digital settings, these dimensions are tested by the immediacy of emotional stimuli and the absence of embodied social cues. Consequently, fostering moral awareness requires more than moral preaching; it demands structured pedagogical experiences that engage learners in moral inquiry, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving. Civic Education classrooms, therefore, should function as microcosms of democratic society, where ethical reasoning, dialogue, and empathy are continuously exercised (Colby & Damon, 2020).

Empirical studies reveal that integrating social-emotional character education within Civic Education enhances students' empathy, prosocial behavior, and ethical decision-making (Schonert-Reichl, 2021; Elias, 2022). Such integration not only strengthens interpersonal sensitivity but also builds resilience against the dehumanizing effects of digital communication. By connecting moral reasoning with emotional understanding, learners are better equipped to navigate complex moral dilemmas online, from issues of digital privacy to algorithmic bias and environmental ethics. This holistic formation of moral awareness ultimately shapes responsible digital citizens who are both intellectually critical and emotionally compassionate. In Indonesia, the challenge of moral degradation among youth—manifested in online intolerance, hoaxes, and cyberbullying—underscores the need for revitalized Civic Education. Government programs such as *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* already emphasize character building, but their implementation in digital contexts remains limited (Kemendikbud, 2023). Strengthening social-emotional character education within the Civic Education curriculum can serve as a corrective measure, ensuring that digital competence is always accompanied by ethical consciousness and empathy-driven action. This moral reorientation reinforces national identity while preparing learners for global digital citizenship.

Theoretically, this study positions moral awareness as an emergent construct shaped by social-emotional character development and digital engagement. It examines how Civic Education can operate as a transformative space for moral cultivation through experiential and reflective learning. By synthesizing perspectives from moral psychology, civic pedagogy, and digital ethics, the study aims to articulate a conceptual framework that links moral awareness with the dynamics of digital social life. This conceptual integration highlights the role of educators as moral facilitators and emotional mentors rather than mere transmitters of civic information.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the role of Civic Education in fostering moral awareness through social-emotional character education in the digital era. It argues that moral awareness must be cultivated as a lived and dialogical process, integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions within digital interactions. The study employs a qualitative, literature-based approach to conceptualize how Civic Education can address moral challenges of digital society while promoting ethical resilience and emotional literacy among learners. In doing so, it contributes to the discourse on moral education for sustainable citizenship, bridging traditional ethical values with the realities of the 21st-century digital environment.

Ultimately, this study contends that building moral awareness through Civic Education is not merely an academic concern but a moral imperative for sustaining democratic and humane digital societies. As digital technologies reshape the ways individuals perceive, feel, and act, education must reclaim its ethical core to guide human development toward empathy, responsibility, and solidarity. In this sense, moral awareness becomes the cornerstone of digital-era citizenship, where emotional intelligence and ethical judgment coalesce in shaping socially responsible and morally conscious individuals.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature-based analytical design that emphasizes conceptual synthesis and interpretive understanding. The choice of a qualitative paradigm is grounded in the belief that moral awareness and social-emotional character are not empirical variables to be quantified but dynamic constructs that must be comprehended through deep hermeneutic exploration. As Creswell and Poth (2021) argue, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to grasp the meaning of human experiences within their cultural and ethical contexts. Accordingly, this research does not aim to measure moral awareness numerically but to articulate how *Civic Education* can function as a transformative medium for moral consciousness in the digital era. The qualitative lens provides flexibility to trace the evolving relationships among cognition, emotion, and morality within educational discourse and digital practices. By employing interpretive reasoning, the researcher can uncover patterns of thought, value orientations, and pedagogical strategies that promote moral sensitivity among digital citizens.

The data sources of this study are drawn from reputable academic journals, books, and official educational documents published between 2015 and 2024, emphasizing works indexed in Scopus and Web of Science that discuss *Civic Education*, *social-emotional learning (SEL)*, *moral psychology*, and *digital ethics*. These sources include theoretical frameworks from scholars such as Narvaez (2020), Arthur et al. (2022), Schonert-Reichl (2021), and Noddings (2022), as well as empirical studies that investigate the intersection of character education and digital citizenship. The selection of literature follows a purposive sampling technique, focusing on materials that explicitly address the moral and emotional dimensions of civic learning in the context of digital transformation. Data were collected through intensive reading, thematic mapping, and comparative synthesis. The process involved identifying core themes moral awareness, emotional intelligence, digital responsibility, and civic engagement and analyzing their interrelations to construct an integrative conceptual model. The data were then organized through open coding and axial categorization to highlight recurring patterns and conceptual linkages that form the basis of interpretive analysis.

The analytical process followed the model of *qualitative content analysis* (Schreier, 2020), combining inductive reasoning with theoretical reflection. Each selected text was examined for its epistemological assumptions, conceptual arguments, and pedagogical implications regarding moral education and social-emotional development. The researcher engaged in interpretive reading to distill underlying moral-philosophical values and pedagogical orientations embedded within the literature. Triangulation was achieved through cross-validation of findings across multiple sources and perspectives to ensure interpretive credibility and theoretical coherence. The analysis culminated in the development of a

conceptual synthesis that connects moral awareness with digital citizenship through the mediating role of social-emotional character education. The validity of this synthesis rests on theoretical saturation achieved when no new conceptual categories emerged from the data and on reflective transparency, as the researcher continuously re-evaluated interpretations in light of ethical and contextual nuances. Thus, this qualitative, literature-based method provides both philosophical depth and empirical relevance, ensuring that the findings contribute meaningfully to the discourse on Civic Education as a moral and emotional foundation for digital-age citizenship.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this qualitative literature analysis reveal that moral awareness in the digital era must be understood as a multidimensional construct that transcends traditional notions of moral reasoning. It encompasses the integration of emotional intelligence, empathy, and digital responsibility three interlocking dimensions that collectively define moral maturity in a hyperconnected society (Narvaez, 2020; Elias, 2022). Within the context of Civic Education, these dimensions provide a foundation for cultivating reflective and responsible citizenship. The data synthesis underscores that moral awareness cannot be transmitted through cognitive instruction alone; rather, it must be internalized through experiential and emotionally engaged learning processes.

A central result of this study is that Civic Education serves as a transformative arena for developing moral awareness through *social-emotional learning (SEL)*. SEL, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), encompasses five interrelated competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies align closely with the goals of moral and civic education, which aim to form citizens capable of ethical reasoning, empathy, and cooperative behavior. Integrating SEL into Civic Education thus enriches students' moral experiences, allowing them to navigate digital complexities with empathy and integrity (Jones et al., 2021).

Another key finding emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between moral awareness and digital citizenship. Digital citizenship requires learners to act ethically, respect others, and engage constructively within online spaces. Without moral awareness, digital competence risks becoming value-neutral, fostering technological proficiency without ethical discernment (Ribble & Park, 2022). Civic Education can bridge this gap by embedding moral reflection within digital literacy, prompting students to consider the ethical implications of their digital behaviors. This integration cultivates not only technical literacy but also moral responsibility—an essential quality for 21st-century citizens (Greenfield, 2023).

The analysis of international literature further indicates that social-emotional character education significantly contributes to moral resilience—the capacity to uphold ethical principles amidst moral ambiguity and emotional stress. In digital contexts, moral resilience allows individuals to resist negative emotional contagion, cyber aggression, and misinformation (Schonert-Reichl, 2021). Within the Indonesian educational context, strengthening this moral resilience aligns with the principles of Pancasila, particularly the values of humanity and social justice (*Kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab*). By fostering empathy and ethical reflection, Civic Education grounded in social-emotional learning revitalizes the moral dimension of national identity in a globalized digital ecosystem.

Furthermore, this study identifies that moral awareness develops through dialogical and participatory pedagogies. When Civic Education is facilitated through discussion, role-play, moral dilemma analysis, and project-based learning, students learn to confront ethical conflicts collaboratively. These methods allow learners to explore diverse perspectives, negotiate values, and cultivate empathy—a process that mirrors democratic participation (Arthur et al., 2022). Hence, moral awareness is best nurtured in classrooms that function as miniature public spheres, where students exercise voice, reason, and compassion.

The findings also demonstrate that digital environments amplify emotional engagement but often weaken moral reflection. The immediacy of digital communication encourages impulsivity and emotional reactivity, which can override ethical deliberation (Vallor, 2021). Therefore, Civic Education must equip learners with emotional regulation skills as part of moral education. Emotional regulation—an element of SEL—helps students pause, reflect, and respond ethically to online stimuli. When emotion is guided by empathy and critical thinking, digital engagement becomes a space for moral growth rather than moral decay.

Another emergent theme from the literature is the need for ethical digital literacy, a concept that extends beyond technical competence to include moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility. Ethical digital literacy prepares students to evaluate information critically, engage respectfully, and contribute positively to digital communities (UNESCO, 2022). Within Civic Education, this means integrating discussions about digital ethics, data privacy, and online civic participation. The moral component transforms digital literacy from a skill-based domain into an ethical practice rooted in civic values (Ribble & Park, 2022).

At the pedagogical level, teachers play a pivotal role as moral facilitators and emotional mentors. Their ability to model empathy, fairness, and ethical reasoning directly influences students' moral development. Studies show that emotionally attuned teachers foster higher levels of student trust, cooperation, and moral awareness (Elias, 2022). Therefore, teacher education programs should emphasize moral pedagogy and emotional intelligence as core competencies. When teachers embody the values they teach, Civic Education becomes an authentic space for character formation rather than ideological transmission.

The synthesis also reveals that Civic Education must evolve from normative moral instruction to reflective moral practice. Traditional civic lessons often focus on memorization of moral rules and civic duties, which limits moral growth to conformity (Colby & Damon, 2020). Reflective moral practice, however, encourages students to question, interpret, and apply moral principles in context. In digital settings, where norms are fluid, this reflective capacity is essential for ethical judgment. By integrating reflective dialogue and social-emotional engagement, Civic Education promotes autonomous moral reasoning that is both principled and empathetic.

In examining the relationship between moral awareness and emotional intelligence, the analysis finds that emotions serve as moral signals that inform ethical decisions (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2022). Moral education that neglects emotional awareness risks producing morally rigid but emotionally detached individuals. Conversely, emotional intelligence without moral grounding can lead to manipulative or self-serving behavior. The synthesis suggests that the optimal approach is moral-emotional integration, where emotions such as empathy, guilt, and moral elevation guide ethical action. Civic Education offers a suitable platform for this integration through dialogical reflection and value-based learning experiences.

The study further identifies the importance of contextualizing moral awareness within local wisdom. In the Indonesian context, the moral values embedded in *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *tenggang rasa* (empathy), and *rasa hormat* (respect) align closely with social-emotional competencies. Embedding these local moral constructs within digital citizenship education ensures cultural relevance while maintaining universal ethical standards (Suryadi & Ardiansyah, 2023). This approach supports UNESCO's call for culturally grounded global citizenship education that integrates local ethics with global responsibility (UNESCO, 2022).

Another significant finding is the role of digital empathy as a moral disposition in online interactions. Digital empathy refers to the ability to understand and respond to others' emotions through mediated communication (Belman & Flanagan, 2020). In digital civic spaces, empathy reduces polarization, encourages dialogue, and strengthens social cohesion. Civic Education can nurture digital empathy through collaborative digital projects, online discussions, and service-learning initiatives that connect emotional understanding with civic engagement. This practice transforms digital platforms into arenas of ethical participation.

The findings also reveal a persistent gap between policy aspirations and pedagogical realities in moral and civic education. Although educational frameworks advocate for holistic

character formation, classroom practices often remain exam-oriented and cognitively fragmented (Kemendikbud, 2023). Teachers face constraints in integrating emotional and moral components due to limited resources, training, and digital literacy. Addressing this gap requires systemic reform, including curriculum redesign, teacher professional development, and institutional support for moral-emotional pedagogies (Arthur et al., 2022).

The discussion highlights that moral awareness in the digital age is inherently relational and dialogical. It emerges from social interactions that challenge individuals to balance self-interest with the common good. As students encounter moral dilemmas online—such as misinformation, hate speech, or privacy breaches—they must negotiate ethical boundaries through empathy and reasoning. Civic Education, when grounded in relational ethics, helps students see moral awareness as a shared human responsibility rather than an individual virtue (Noddings, 2022).

Furthermore, the digital transformation of society necessitates a redefinition of civic virtue. Classical virtues such as honesty, respect, and justice must now be reinterpreted in digital contexts—manifesting as digital honesty, data respect, and algorithmic fairness (Vallor, 2021). Civic Education must engage students in exploring how traditional moral values translate into ethical digital behaviors. This interpretive process deepens their moral understanding while enhancing civic participation in digital democracy.

Another dimension identified is the importance of reflective digital practices, where learners critically assess their online actions and emotional responses. Reflection journals, ethical debates, and online community projects have been shown to enhance moral self-awareness and empathy (Schonert-Reichl, 2021). Through guided reflection, students recognize the moral consequences of their digital presence and cultivate ethical intentionality. Civic Education thus becomes not only a knowledge-based discipline but also a transformative practice of self-reflection and ethical action.

The overall discussion suggests that building moral awareness through social-emotional character education contributes directly to democratic resilience. In pluralistic societies, moral awareness fosters tolerance, empathy, and solidarity—values essential for sustaining democracy in the face of digital fragmentation and misinformation (Arthur et al., 2022). When Civic Education integrates these moral and emotional dimensions, it reinforces social trust and civic responsibility, enabling students to participate meaningfully in public life both offline and online.

Finally, the synthesis concludes that the future of moral and civic education depends on the fusion of emotion, ethics, and digital literacy. Civic Education must not merely adapt to digital transformation but must lead it by humanizing technology through moral awareness. Educators, policymakers, and communities must collaborate to cultivate emotionally intelligent citizens who embody empathy, responsibility, and justice in digital and real-world interactions. Such transformation ensures that education remains a moral force in shaping humane and sustainable societies.

Conclusion

The study concludes that building moral awareness through Civic Education represents an essential response to the ethical challenges of the digital age. Moral awareness, in this framework, is not merely a matter of knowing moral principles but of living them through emotional intelligence, empathy, and reflective engagement. The findings demonstrate that digital environments have reshaped the moral terrain, demanding educational approaches that unite cognition and emotion in cultivating ethical agency. Civic Education, when integrated with social-emotional learning (SEL), provides an effective foundation for fostering this unity. By embedding moral reflection within digital literacy, educators can transform Civic Education from a normative subject into a dynamic space for moral dialogue and emotional development, thereby strengthening students' ability to act responsibly and compassionately in online and offline contexts.

Furthermore, the integration of social-emotional character education into Civic Education enhances students' ethical sensitivity, digital empathy, and sense of civic responsibility. The interplay between moral reasoning and emotional regulation equips learners to navigate complex moral dilemmas in the digital sphere, such as misinformation, online aggression, and moral disengagement. This integration affirms the pedagogical principle that moral understanding cannot be detached from emotional experience. Civic Education that intentionally cultivates empathy, reflection, and ethical communication becomes a transformative platform for nurturing moral citizens in an increasingly digital society. It also supports the development of *digital moral resilience*—the capacity to maintain ethical integrity despite exposure to digital conflicts and moral uncertainties.

In the Indonesian context, the revitalization of moral awareness through Civic Education aligns deeply with the ethical vision of Pancasila and local wisdom traditions. Values such as *gotong royong*, *tenggang rasa*, and *rasa hormat* serve as the moral foundation for cultivating empathy and social harmony, resonating with the global framework of Education for Sustainable Development (SDG 4.7). Embedding these indigenous values within the digital moral framework ensures that technological progress remains rooted in humanity and cultural ethics. Thus, Civic Education does not only transmit knowledge of civic duties but also revitalizes moral identity and national character in the midst of global digital transformation. The synthesis of local moral wisdom and global citizenship values forms a distinctive contribution of Indonesia to the global discourse on moral and civic education.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms that moral awareness is the ethical cornerstone of democratic life in the digital era. Civic Education must evolve as a humanizing force that integrates emotional, ethical, and technological competencies. Educators, policymakers, and researchers must collaborate to design learning environments that engage both mind and heart, fostering empathy, dialogue, and responsibility. The future of moral and civic education depends on this integration—where emotion becomes the energy of ethics, and ethics becomes the compass of digital participation. Through this holistic vision, education can once again serve as a transformative power for shaping humane, ethical, and sustainable digital societies.

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