

Reconceptualizing Civic Education in Indonesian Vocational Schools: a Critical Literacy Adaptation

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Abstract: Pancasila education in vocational high schools (SMK) is often implemented normatively and focuses on shaping obedience, thus potentially producing graduates who are technically competent but have weak civic awareness. This conceptual article aims to reconstruct civic education through the adaptation of Critical Literacy theory enriched with Habermas' Communicative Action Theory. Using Jaakkola's theoretical adaptation approach, this study synthesizes the normative framework of Pancasila Education (Domain Theory) with the principles of critical literacy (Method Theory). The result is a conceptual model that transforms Pancasila Education from a doctrinal approach to an empowering approach. This model is operationalized through four main propositions: (1) using Pancasila as a critical lens to question dominant narratives, (2) analyzing vocational issues from a multi-stakeholder perspective with argumentative validity, (3) connecting personal problems with structural injustice, and (4) realizing mutual cooperation through vocational social projects. Implicitly, this model requires cross-curricular integration, dialogic pedagogy, and authentic assessment systems. This article concludes that the adaptation of critical literacy offers a new paradigm for aligning vocational competencies with critical citizenship capacities. To that end, further research is recommended to empirically test the effectiveness of this model, develop teaching materials, and explore its implementation in the context of digital literacy.

Keywords: civic education; civic literacy; critical literacy; theory adaptation; vocational school.

Introduction

Indonesia's national education system is required to be able to respond to the complex challenges of the 21st century, particularly in preparing students to face global dynamics and an ever-evolving job market. In this context, vocational schools (SMK) play a strategic role in producing graduates who are not only technically skilled (hard skills), but also have strong character and noble ethics as part of their soft skills (Sudjimat, 2017; Yoto, 2017). This alignment is in line with the latest Learning Outcomes (CP) through the Head of BSKAP Decree Number 046/H/KR/2025, which emphasizes the importance of the Eight Dimensions of Graduate

Profile, covering the aspects of Citizenship, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Collaboration (BSKAP, 2025).

Pancasila education in the Merdeka Curriculum serves as the main foundation for the formation of these dimensions. Explicitly, this subject aims to shape students into intelligent, honest, virtuous, and responsible citizens. The learning is realized through citizenship practices based on Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and commitment to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (BSKAP, 2025). The urgency of this approach is even more apparent considering that vocational school/MAK graduates in Phase E (Grade X) and Phase F (Grades XI–XII/XIII)

immediately enter the industrial world, which is fraught with complex socio-economic realities. This is where the conventional concept of Pancasila Education, which only focuses on knowledge transfer and obedience, becomes inadequate because it has the potential to produce graduates who are technically competent but weak in socio-political awareness and unable to question power structures (Chatti, 2012). Therefore, a deep recontextualization is needed so that Pancasila Education in vocational schools does not merely shape moral obedience but also develops critical citizenship agency so that technical competence is balanced with critical reasoning and ethical-political action.

Methodologically, this conceptual article uses the Theory Adaptation approach according to Jaakkola (2020). This approach is applied to develop existing theory (Domain Theory) by utilizing other perspectives (Method Theory) to create a more in-depth and contextual shift in perspective. The Domain Theory in this paper is Pancasila Education within the normative framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools based on BSKAP Decree Number 046/H/KR/2025. Meanwhile, the Method Theory that serves as the lens of analysis is Critical Literacy, enriched by George Lee (2020) Two Plus Four Dimensions framework.

Based on Jaakkola (2020), the theory adaptation process begins with the identification and

problematization of Domain Theory, followed by the selection of Method Theory as an alternative perspective, and analysis of the influence of Method Theory in enriching Domain Theory. Through these stages, this study presents a major contribution in the form of a new concept of Pancasila Education in vocational schools that focuses on the development of critical citizenship agency. This concept is designed so that graduates are able to face the complexities of the industrial world and social life. All arguments in this report are structured according to Jaakkola (2020). Theory Adaptation logic, which consists of domain theory diagnosis, method theory synthesis, and the formulation of theory adaptation propositions.

Theoretical Framework

Domain Theory: Pancasila Education in Phases E and F of SMASMK/MAK

Pancasila Education in the Merdeka Curriculum, as stipulated in BSKAP Decree 046/H/KR/2025, has a strong philosophical foundation. Its main objective is to develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students will apply in their social, national, and civic lives. Learning must include values, knowledge, and basic skills. The elements of Civic Education that are the focus of Phases E and F (vocational high school/MAK level) are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Elements of Pancasila Education Subjects in Phase E and Phase F (BSKAP 046/H/KR/2025).

Element	Description of Learning Outcomes	
	Phase E	Phase F
Pancasila	Analyze the position and perspectives of the framers regarding Pancasila as the foundation of the state, a way of life, and an ideology.	Analyzing the interrelationship between the principles, the challenges of their implementation in the global world, and cultivating behavior that is in line with the values of Pancasila.
The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia	Applying legal compliance and analyzing the Indonesian legal system and the position of Pancasila as a source of law.	Analyzing the dynamics of the 1945 Constitution, demonstrating democratic attitudes, and examining cases of violations of citizens' rights and obligations to formulate legal solutions.
Unity in Diversity	Interpreting Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as social capital and understanding mutual	Analyzing the potential for conflict due to diversity to provide fair solutions and design

	cooperation as the embodiment of a just Pancasila economy.	mutual cooperation-based activities.
Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI)	Analyzing Indonesia's role in the global arena and understanding the role of citizens, the defense system, and the values of Pancasila in national development.	Demonstrating the practice of Pancasila democracy and analyzing threats and the Indonesian government system to formulate solutions.

In Phase E, vocational school students are expected to be able to analyze the position of Pancasila as an ideological foundation and devise solutions to various behaviors that are not in line with its values. In addition, they must also apply an attitude of obedience to the law and understand the hierarchy of legislation. If the pedagogical interpretation of Pancasila Education at this stage only stops at the formation of formal obedience, this subject has the potential to be instrumental. This means that the learning process merely becomes a tool to create obedience without building critical understanding and active participation in democratic life (Cohen, 2021; Evans, 2006; Pigozzo & Martinelli, 2020).

Meanwhile, in Phase F, the demands develop into the ability to analyze potential conflicts and provide fair solutions to issues of diversity in society. Students are also required to practice freedom of expression in the era of information openness and to behave in accordance with the law. The demand to "provide fair solutions" requires the ability to read power structures and

social inequalities. Unfortunately, to date, there is no evidence that Pancasila education in vocational schools specifically trains students in deconstructing power relations and inequality. The focus of learning is still dominated by the mastery of technical competencies and work readiness tailored to the demands of industry and the labor market (Sudana et al., 2019; Widiyanti et al., 2017; Wiyono & Haryudo, 2023).

Method Theory: Critical Literacy and Communicative Rationality (George Lee, 2020)

To overcome the limitations of the PKN Domain Theory, this study adopts the Two Plus Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy framework from George Lee (2020), which is rooted in the work of Paulo Freire. This framework consists of the Four Basic Dimensions (FDCL) from Lewison et al. (2002) and Two Plus Dimensions (TCA Habermas). These dimensions provide tools for transforming normative PKN knowledge into transformative praxis.

Table 2. Core Components of the Methodological Theory: Critical Literacy FDCL and TCA Habermas (George Lee, 2020).

Critical Dimension	Main Aspects	Critical Function Regarding the PKN Domain
FDCL 1: Disrupting the Commonplace	Norms & Assumptions Considered Normal	Questioning dominant narratives (e.g., total compliance in the workplace) and testing them against Social Justice (Pancasila)
FDCL 2: Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	Dual Perspectives & Missing Voices	Analyzing vocational issues (e.g., wages/contracts) from various parties (management, labor, regulators)
FDCL 3: Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	Structural Systems & Sociopolitical Context	Connecting personal issues in vocational schools (e.g., gender discrimination in engineering) to broader systems of inequality
FDCL 4: Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	Praxis (Reflection + Action)	Encouraging students to use their vocational competencies to design transformative solutions

Two Dimensions Plus (TCA Habermas)	Discursive Rationality & Safe Environment	Providing rational criteria (Truth, Normative Accuracy, Sincerity) to validate claims and ensure equal dialogue
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According to George Lee (2020), Functional Dualistic Critical Literacy (FDCL) has fundamental limitations because it does not provide agreed-upon evaluative criteria for assessing various claims, thus risking plunging the critical process into relativism (Baghranian, 2015). To overcome this weakness, Lee (2020) proposes the integration of certain features of Jurgen Habermas' Communicative Action Theory (CAT). Habermas (1984) emphasizes that healthy communication must be based on the ability to justify claims through three universal validity claims: Truth Claims on factual propositions, Normative Accuracy Claims in accordance with ethics and law, and Sincerity Claims on the speaker's intentions. The application of this framework ensures that vocational high school students' critical reasoning becomes procedural and tested, so that they can distinguish valid claims from manipulative ones. Furthermore, George Lee (2020) highlights that FDCL pays little attention to the

conditions of the discourse environment, while Habermas (1984) complements this with the concept of an Ideal Speech Situation that is free from coercion and guarantees equal participation. The integration of these concepts is highly relevant to creating a safe and inclusive deliberative space in Pancasila Education, which encourages vocational high school students from various backgrounds to boldly investigate sociopolitical issues without fear (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019), while promoting human brotherhood.

Theory Adaptation Process

Based on Jaakkola (2020) theory adaptation methodology, the synthesis of PKn/Civic Education (Domain Theory) and critical literacy (Method Theory) produces an adaptation concept summarized below.

Table 3. Theory Adaptation Matrix: Transformation of Vocational Civic Education through Critical Literacy.

Critical Dimensions	Main Aspect	Critical Function Regarding the PKn Domain
FDCL 1: Disrupting the Commonplace	Norms & Assumptions Considered Normal	Questioning dominant narratives (e.g., total compliance in the workplace) and testing them against Social Justice (Pancasila)
FDCL 2: Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	Dual Perspectives & Missing Voices	Analyzing vocational issues (e.g., wages/contracts) from various parties (management, labor, regulators)
FDCL 3: Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues	Structural Systems & Sociopolitical Context	Connecting personal issues in vocational schools (e.g., gender discrimination in engineering) to broader systems of inequality
FDCL 4: Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice	Praxis (Reflection + Action)	Encouraging students to use their vocational competencies to design transformative solutions
Two Dimensions Plus (Habermas's TCA)	Discursive Rationality & Safe Environment	Providing rational criteria (Truth, Normative Accuracy, Sincerity) to validate claims and ensure equal dialogue

1. Proposition 1: Transforming Pancasila from Dogma to Critical Lens (Disrupting the Commonplace)

This proposition rejects the positioning of Pancasila as an untouchable "god" that cannot be criticized.

Instead, Pancasila is used as an analytical tool to dismantle socio-economic policies and practices that may contradict its basic values. Students are encouraged not to simply accept commonplace claims, such as "imports are necessary for efficiency," but to test them against the Fifth Principle of social justice. Do these spare parts import policies actually kill local industry and create dependency, thereby being unfair?

This approach is in line with the spirit of Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes that education must enable learners to 'read' their world critically, not just 'read words' (Freire & Macedo, 2005). In other words, the transformation from dogma to a critical lens is a concrete form of 'critical consciousness' (conscientization) that enables the birth of social agency. More specifically, the act of 'disrupting the commonplace' is the foundation of critical literacy, which views all texts, including public policy, as social constructs that are not neutral and are negotiable (Lewison et al., 2002).

2. *Proposition 2: The 1945 Constitution and Rational Interrogation (Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints & TCA)*

This second proposition aims to clarify the meaning of "freedom of expression," which is often misunderstood as unlimited freedom. Through Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints, students are not only encouraged to look at an issue from other perspectives, but also to experience firsthand the complexity and fragmentation of interests within society. An analysis of the Labor Law, for example, will bring together different claims of truth between the logic of economic efficiency (employers), the logic of a decent livelihood (workers), and the logic of national order (government). This is where Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action (TCA) plays the role of a strict "rational referee." Three claims of validity, propositional truth, normative correctness, and expressive sincerity, serve as filters that prevent discussions from becoming mired in rhetoric, emotional manipulation, or arguments from authority (Habermas, 1984).

This process is essentially an exercise in building an ideal communicative environment

(ideal speech situation) on a micro scale. In this space, the coordination of social actions is no longer based on power or coercion, but on the strength of the best arguments recognized by all parties involved. Thus, freedom of expression is guided towards a responsible discourse ethic. This kind of practice is at the heart of deliberative democratic education, which aims to shape citizens who can not only voice their opinions, but also provide publicly accountable reasons and listen to the reasons of others with respect (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

3. *Proposition 3: Unity in Diversity and Analysis of Vocational Sociopolitical Issues (Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues & TCA)*

This proposition connects the abstract concept of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" with the everyday problems faced by vocational students. Diversity is no longer just celebrated in the form of cultural festivals, but analyzed in the context of structural inequality (for example, infrastructure inequality between Java and outside Java, which has an impact on access to expertise and employment). By focusing on sociopolitical issues, personal problems (such as difficulty finding work) are seen as symptoms of systemic problems. The addition of the Ideal Communication Community from TCA ensures that discussions on these sensitive issues are not dominated by the most powerful voices, but rather provide a safe space for all voices to be heard, a prerequisite for true unity in diversity.

The addition of the Ideal Communicative Environment dimension from TCA is crucial because structural issues like these are fraught with tension and conflicts of interest. Without a discussion space protected from the dominance of power (e.g., the most dominant voices of teachers or students), an in-depth analysis of inequality will be difficult to uncover. This inclusive space allows the voices of groups affected by inequality (e.g., students from disadvantaged areas) to be heard equally. This approach is in line with Young (1990) theory of social justice, which emphasizes that injustice is not only a matter of unequal distribution of material resources, but also a matter of oppressive and systemic power relations. Furthermore, this analysis will be even more

incisive when viewed through the lens of intersectionality, which understands that a person's experience of injustice is often the result of the intersection of various marginalized identities such as ethnicity, class, and geography (Crenshaw, 2013)

4. *Proposition 4: NKRI, Mutual Cooperation, and Vocational Agency Practices (Taking Action)*

The fourth proposition is the crystallization and real test of the entire critical process that preceded it. Taking Action here is not a momentary charitable activity, but rather a dignified vocational social action. This dignity arises because students do not simply "give fish," but "teach fishing" or even "repair the pond" using the skills they have mastered. A Vocational Social Project (VSP) in the field of IT, for example, which aims to build a website to market local MSME products that have been marginalized by large online market systems, is a concrete manifestation of the Fifth Principle. This action transforms the abstract concepts of "NKRI" and "gotong royong" into a collective project that is visible and measurable.

The pinnacle of democratic education is to create citizens who are not only knowledgeable and critical, but also actively participate in improving their society. The model of citizenship produced here is that of a justice-oriented citizen, who understands the root causes of social problems and is committed to overcoming them through collective action (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Philosophically, VSP is the perfect embodiment of John Dewey's principle of learning by doing, which views schools as laboratories of

democracy where knowledge and civic values are built through direct experience in solving community problems (Dewey, 1916).

These four propositions collectively describe a paradigm shift from dogmatic and nationalistic-symbolic civic education to critical and socio-pragmatic civic education. This approach aims not only to produce obedient citizens, but also citizens who are agents of change, capable of using their vocational competencies to analyze, critique, and solve socio-political problems around them. The integration of Critical Literacy, Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action (TCA), and the values of Pancasila creates a unique and contextual synthesis for Indonesian education.

Implications

This reconceptualization requires a shift in the pedagogical paradigm that includes synergy between the curriculum, teaching models, and assessment. Adapting this theory requires PKn to function as an ethical and sociopolitical driver for other vocational and academic subjects. The justification for this table is to visualize how the critical objectives of PKn can be operated contextually and authentically through vocational subjects, thereby overcoming the dualism of knowledge and strengthening the relevance of citizenship in the vocational environment. Table 4 illustrates this integration:

Table 4. Interdisciplinary Integration.

Key Vocational Subjects	Competency Focus	Critical Literacy/Civic Education Integration
Computer Science & Coding	Digital Literacy, Artificial Intelligence Ethics, Computational Thinking	Analyzing bias in algorithms, evaluating the ethical responsibilities of artificial intelligence developers
IPAS/Economics Project	Scarcity, Economic Behavior, Welfare, Inter-spatial Connectivity	Connecting economic inequality with Social Justice (5th Principle of Pancasila) through Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues
Indonesian	Reading, writing, speaking, viewing multimodal expository/discussion texts	Using legal/industrial texts (e.g., employment contracts) as critical texts to be interrogated and advocated
Entrepreneurship	Opportunity analysis, creative idea formulation, business analysis	Directing innovation towards social justice and sustainability, beyond a focus on pure profit.

The application of Critical Literacy requires the implementation of student-centered learning models and the provision of scaffolding. Based on the integration of Habermas' Communicative Action Theory (CAT) (George Lee, 2020; Habermas, 1984). This environment must fulfill two main principles: (1) upholding equal participation for all participants, and (2) prioritizing the validation of claims based on the strength of arguments, not individual authority or position. The existence of such a safe environment is very important for training students' independence and social skills within the framework of their well-being development.

The assessment system must be designed to measure students' capacity for critical action. The assessment focuses on the following three aspects: (1) The ability to disrupt power structures, which is the ability of students to analyze and question existing power structures; (2) the ability to Argue Rationally (Interrogating and TCA), which assesses students' ability to use TCA criteria to formulate fair solutions; and (3) the ability to Perform Vocational Praxis (Taking Action), which assesses the quality and impact of the Vocational Social Project carried out by students.

Conclusions

This article proposes the integration of Critical Literacy enriched with Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action to transform citizenship education into something more contextual and empowering. Through a theoretical adaptation approach, a concept was developed that combines elements of Pancasila Education with critical literacy principles, manifested in four adaptive propositions: transforming Pancasila from dogma into a critical lens; encouraging multiperspective analysis of vocational issues; connecting personal problems with sociopolitical structures; and encouraging real action through vocational social projects. The implementation of this model requires cross-subject integration, the application of dialogic pedagogy, and an assessment system that measures deconstruction, rational argumentation, and vocational praxis skills. Based

on these findings, further research is recommended to empirically test the effectiveness of this model in vocational high school settings, including its impact on students' critical awareness and social participation.

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