

# Cultural Literacy and Civic Education in Multicultural Universities in Indonesia and Malaysia

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## Abstract

Higher education institutions in culturally diverse societies have a vital role in fostering citizenship that is inclusive, democratic, and responsive to cultural differences. In Southeast Asia, especially in postcolonial settings such as Indonesia and Malaysia, civic education is commonly framed as a means of reinforcing national identity. However, this approach often fails to adequately recognize the varied cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of students. This study explores the ways cultural literacy is incorporated into civic education within higher education and examines its influence on the formation of students' civic identities in multicultural learning settings. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research was carried out at two public universities, one located in Indonesia and the other in Malaysia, chosen for their culturally diverse student populations and involvement in civic oriented programs. Data collection involved document analysis, semi structured interviews with 24 lecturers, curriculum developers, and students, along with classroom observations conducted over a three month period. Thematic analysis identified an ongoing gap between civic education objectives at the policy level and everyday classroom practices, particularly in negotiating national narratives alongside cultural diversity. The findings reveal tensions between state centered civic models and culturally responsive teaching approaches, while also highlighting effective practices such as community based learning, student led discussions, and the inclusion of local wisdom. This study contends that cultural literacy, supported by strategic empathy and critical reflection, is central to promoting meaningful civic participation and inclusive forms of citizenship. By emphasizing students' lived cultural experiences, this research contributes to broader discussions on transformative civic education and provides practical insights for advancing culturally grounded and socially just civic learning in higher education contexts across the Global South.

**Keywords:** Cultural literacy; Civic education; Multicultural higher education

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## 1. Introduction

In Indonesia, higher education institutions play an important role in promoting civic awareness, democratic values, and inclusive citizenship in a culturally and ethnically diverse society. Like many countries in the Global South, Indonesia sees civic education as a way to address past marginalization and support active governance, particularly among young people (Unesco, 2021). However, ongoing issues such as ethnonationalism, religious exclusivity, and the lack of representation for minority communities in formal education highlight the need for civic learning that responds to local cultures (Subkhan, 2019). To address this, Indonesian universities have started to incorporate local wisdom, interfaith dialogue, and community-based experiences. Examples include Pancasila-based courses, village service programs (Kuliah Kerja Nyata), and student civic forums, all of which aim to contextualize civic education in ways that build mutual respect, national identity, and pluralism (Ogiemwonyi & Harun, 2021; Prabowo et al., 2022). These efforts indicate a shift toward civic education as a dynamic and inclusive practice, preparing students to be engaged citizens committed to creating a just and democratic society.

Despite these goals, many civic education programs remain focused on legal aspects of the state, the constitution, and governance, with little regard for the daily experiences and cultural identities of learners. This often alienates students from minority or indigenous backgrounds whose civic experiences are not properly recognized in formal curricula (J. A. Banks, 2008; Zembylas, 2015b). As a result, civic education can

reinforce rather than address exclusionary narratives, hindering efforts to create pluralistic and equitable societies.

In response, this article stresses the importance of integrating cultural literacy into civic education, which involves understanding, respecting, and engaging critically with various cultural traditions. Cultural literacy enhances empathy, intercultural dialogue, and the deconstruction of ethnocentric views. These elements are essential for democratic participation in diverse societies (Gay, 2018). Incorporating this aspect into civic learning can shift the focus from formalistic instruction to meaningful civic engagement centered on social justice and mutual recognition.

This study aligns with increasing critiques of the monocultural nature of civic education and calls for reforms based on students' lived cultural experiences (Syamsijulianto et al., 2024) (Janks, 2014; Mutekwe, 2017b). The research focuses on universities in Indonesia, part of the Southeast Asian region, which has postcolonial and multicultural dynamics relevant to many countries today. It looks at how civic education policies, teaching methods, and student experiences in Indonesia include or overlook the cultural aspect in shaping civic identity. The main focus is to which current higher education policies integrate cultural literacy into civic learning goals, how instructors apply teaching methods that respond to cultural diversity, and the challenges and opportunities in aligning civic and cultural aims in a diverse academic setting.

Additionally, this research is guided by inclusion, fairness, and addressing colonial legacies in education. This aims not only to analyze these dynamics but also to encourage changes in curricula and teaching practices that promote social justice. This study contributes both theoretically and practically to citizenship education in developing countries, particularly Indonesia, helping to create a more contextual and humane approach to educating culturally aware and democratic citizens.

## **2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Integrating cultural literacy into civic education in higher education calls for a diverse theoretical approach that looks at both the psychological growth of learners and the structural inequalities in the education system. In increasingly diverse societies worldwide, like Southeast Asia and other developing regions, civic education cannot rely on uniform and state-centered narratives. Instead, a citizenship curriculum must connect cultural diversity, complex histories, and collective identities to promote inclusive and socially fair citizenship education. Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1997) provides insights into this process by highlighting the importance of critical self-reflection and dialogic engagement. When students face challenging dilemmas that question their core beliefs, they start to examine long-held views about nationality, identity, and civic responsibility (Illeris, 2014; Taylor & Laros, 2014a). This experience fosters deeper personal awareness and empathy toward marginalized experiences, enriching the process of civic learning.

Building on this foundation, critical multicultural education offers a strong framework for addressing power dynamics within civic education. Banks (2008) and Nieto (2004) argue that merely celebrating cultural events or cuisines without addressing colonial histories and social injustices is not enough. Instead, curricula must include minority perspectives, indigenous knowledge, and community-centered civic practices. This view is particularly important in postcolonial settings where educational content often emphasizes national loyalty over diverse engagement (Davies et al., 2018; Janks, 2014; Khalo & Mpu, 2023). Moreover, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) strengthens this framework by aligning teaching strategies with students' cultural values and communication styles, making civic learning more relevant and empowering. Research from South Africa and Indonesia shows that students become more critically engaged and politically aware when civic education reflects their lived experiences and cultural narratives (J. Jansen, 2017; Siregar, 2023; Zembylas, 2018). Thus, these interconnected theories and teaching methods create a powerful roadmap for reimagining civic education in ways that are culturally grounded, politically aware, and socially transformative.

### **2.1. Transformative Learning Theory**

Students' civic identities can shift in multicultural higher education settings through transformative learning theories. Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1987) offers a helpful framework to explore how university students in diverse contexts can reshape their civic identities through reflection and dialogue. When learners encounter situations that challenge their assumptions, they undergo a process of self-examination

that can lead to significant changes in their worldviews. This reflective journey is especially impactful in civic education, where students often examine inherited narratives of nationalism, cultural superiority, or exclusionary beliefs. Cranton (2009) emphasizes that this transformation is holistic, involving not just cognition but emotional and relational dimensions. As learners interact with peers from varied backgrounds, they develop a more nuanced, empathetic, and justice-focused sense of citizenship that goes beyond legal definitions. In line with Taylor & Laros (2014b), intercultural dialogue supports inclusive civic identities and prepares students to contribute ethically in diverse societies. Building on this foundation, the next section will explore how culturally responsive teaching and critical multicultural education enhance the transformative potential of civic learning in higher education.

## ***2.2. Critical Multicultural Education***

Critical multicultural education fundamentally reimagines how diversity, power, and knowledge interact in learning environments, particularly in postcolonial settings. Unlike superficial approaches that reduce cultural understanding to token celebrations of food and festivals, this pedagogy urges educators and students to confront systemic inequalities and historical gaps in curricula (Banks, 2019; Nieto, 1996). It advocates for an awareness of how dominant perspectives can marginalize non-Western views, perpetuating what scholars like Spivak call “epistemic violence.” This approach redefines cultural literacy as an active, critical process where learners examine their positionalities, recognize privilege, and take on civic responsibilities within broader social contexts (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This is particularly important in Global South countries where civic education is often used as a tool of the state, promoting a uniform national identity instead of encouraging diverse dialogue (Unesco, 2021; Zajda, 2021). To challenge this, scholars support integrating indigenous knowledge, minority voices, and community-based civic practices such as oral histories, collective stewardship, and intergenerational mentorship into educational frameworks (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Janks, 2014). By adopting these transformative teaching methods, higher education can become a space not only for learning about diversity but for embodying equity, dignity, and civic empowerment in contextually meaningful and socially just ways. The next section examines how these principles can be applied through institutional changes and innovative teaching across African higher education landscapes.

## ***2.3 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Civic Education***

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), as described by Geneva Gay (2018), highlights the need to align teaching methods with students’ cultural experiences, communication styles, and values. In civic education, CRP allows educators to move from abstract and impersonal content to real-life situations that resonate with students’ everyday civic experiences. It encourages teachers to use local issues, oral histories, and community-based projects as foundations for civic learning.

Research from the Global South shows that when civic education includes cultural aspects like language rights, religious diversity, and indigenous justice systems, students are more likely to engage, reflect, and act socially responsibly (Mutekwe, 2017a; Zembylas, 2015a). CRP also promotes student agency, particularly among marginalized groups whose civic stories are often ignored or overlooked.

## ***2.4 Literature on Civic Education and Cultural Literacy in Higher Education***

A growing number of studies highlight the shortcomings of traditional civic education in meeting the needs of culturally diverse societies, particularly in postcolonial contexts across Africa and Asia. Researchers have pointed out that civic curricula, often shaped by government agendas, tend to silence or marginalize the experiences and knowledge of ethnic minorities, indigenous communities, and women (Jansen, 2019; Menashy & Dryden-Peterson, 2015). These curricula frequently focus on constitutional memorization and national pride, neglecting the fluid and lived experiences of citizenship that arise from everyday civic involvement. This approach fails to encourage students to reflect critically on power, identity, and belonging, thereby reinforcing narrow and exclusionary definitions of citizenship. In contrast, a broader vision of civic education that prioritizes cultural literacy can foster inclusive and pluralistic democratic participation.

Recent scholarship increasingly frames cultural literacy as a key civic skill in a world marked by global migration, historical reckoning, and the rise of ethno-nationalism (Unesco, 2021). Cultural literacy enables students to navigate cultural differences, question essentialist narratives, and build empathy across various identities and power dynamics. In practice, universities in South Africa and Malaysia have begun to decolonize

their civic education by integrating indigenous narratives, student-led dialogue, and community-engaged learning into their curricula (Jansen, 2017; Suffian et al., 2025). These educational innovations not only validate student identities but also promote intercultural solidarity, a foundation for sustainable democracy. Positioned within this changing landscape, this study draws on transformative learning theory, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive pedagogy to investigate how civic education can be reimagined in higher education (Syamsijulianto, 2023). These frameworks together emphasize the need to view civic learning not as a static transmission of national ideals but as a dynamic, context-sensitive process rooted in justice, dialogue, and cultural relevance.

### **3. Method**

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine how cultural literacy is integrated into civic education practices in two public universities, one in Indonesia and one in Malaysia. Both universities were selected for their multicultural student bodies and their involvement in civic initiatives. By taking a case study approach, the research aimed to capture the depth and nuances of how civic identity and cultural awareness are developed in real educational settings (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This choice of method reflects the study's focus on lived experiences and the socio-cultural aspects of higher education in the Global South.

To gather detailed and contextual data, the research employed three main methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Civic education syllabi, national curricula, and institutional policy documents were analyzed to uncover how cultural literacy is formally positioned within the educational framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants, including lecturers, curriculum developers, and students. This provided diverse perspectives on how civic and cultural goals are understood and implemented. Classroom observations over three months allowed the researcher to see how teaching practices matched or differed from the stated curricular goals. This combination of methods improved the study's reliability and highlighted both structural and interpersonal aspects of civic learning (Patton, 2015).

Thematic coding was used to analyze the qualitative data, following the framework laid out by Saldaña (2016). The analysis focused on recurring patterns, gaps in practice, and promising innovations. Key themes that emerged included the tension between national identity and cultural diversity in course content, the importance of local wisdom and indigenous knowledge in student engagement, and the challenges educators face when discussing sensitive cultural issues in civic discussions. Lecturers in both institutions noted that it is difficult to remain neutral while facilitating discussions about religion and ethnicity, which can be politically and emotionally charged in the classroom.

Building on these findings, the analysis also highlighted examples of effective practices, such as student-led forums, community-based projects, and culturally relevant assignments that encouraged critical thinking and intercultural empathy. These approaches fostered deeper student engagement and challenged traditional models of knowledge transmission in favor of collaborative, participatory learning environments. Thus, the study emphasizes the significance of culturally responsive teaching in civic education and points to the potential of Southeast Asian universities to contribute meaningfully to global discussions on inclusive and transformative civic learning (Banks, 2008; Ibrahim, 2016; Suffian et al., 2025; Thu Nguyen et al., 2020). This grounded, human-centered approach offers valuable insights for other multicultural educational settings, including those in Africa.

### **4. Findings**

#### ***4.1 Policy Disjunctions***

Despite national declarations supporting multiculturalism, such as Indonesia's *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) and Malaysia's *Rukun Negara* (National Principles), the civic education policies in both countries largely focus on state-centered narratives. These policies prioritize loyalty to the nation, understanding formal constitutional structures, and adopting prescribed national values. While this focus may promote unity and patriotism, it also limits the civic space by marginalizing the rich cultural diversity and pluralistic realities that

shape students' lives (Kee et al., 2022; Subkhan, 2019). The gap between multicultural ideals and policy implementation reveals what can be termed a "policy disjunction," where official commitments to diversity do not translate into educational frameworks.

This disjunction is clear in the limited curricular mentions of indigenous knowledge systems, minority narratives, and local civic traditions. Document analysis of both university curricula showed extensive coverage of civic duties, constitutional rights, and national ideology. However, there is a notable absence of learning objectives or assessment criteria that specifically address cultural literacy or critical multicultural skills. As Janks (2014) and Mutekwe (2017a) point out, these gaps perpetuate epistemic injustice by favoring dominant knowledge systems and silencing marginalized voices. Consequently, civic education risks becoming a tool for assimilation rather than a platform for democratic engagement and intercultural understanding.

Interviews with lecturers and curriculum developers further highlighted the disconnect between policy discussions and teaching practice. While many educators acknowledged the need to include cultural perspectives in civic education, they cited constraints like strict accreditation standards, a lack of culturally relevant materials, and minimal institutional support. For example, a lecturer from an Indonesian public university commented, "We discuss diversity in theory, but there is no mandate or framework guiding us on how to teach it in civic classes." This reflects findings in other postcolonial contexts, where implementing multicultural education often remains superficial (J. A. Banks & McGee Banks, 2010; UNESCO, 2021).

To move beyond these limitations, there is a need to reshape civic education policies to prioritize cultural literacy and pluralism as essential competencies. Such a shift would align with global calls for inclusive and transformative education (Brookfield, 2012; UNESCO, 2021) and resonate with students' varied cultural backgrounds and aspirations. The next section will explore how educators in both countries try to address these policy gaps through grassroots innovations and culturally responsive teaching.

#### ***4.2 Classroom Implementation***

The implementation of civic education in classrooms at two Indonesian universities reveals a complex landscape shaped by structural limits and teaching creativity. On one end, some lecturers followed a strict standard syllabus that focused primarily on national ideology, legal structures, and state-mandated civic duties. These classes often relied heavily on rote learning, textbook instruction, and limited student participation. As noted in student interviews, this method can make civics education feel abstract and detached from real-world civic identities and cultural experiences. This trend is not unique to Southeast Asia; similar patterns have been seen in postcolonial African institutions, where formal curricula often restrict educators from tailoring content to local contexts (Hoppers, 2023).

Conversely, several educators demonstrated creativity in rethinking civic learning through culturally responsive teaching. These lecturers included case studies based on local customs, encouraged student-led exploration of ethnic traditions, and utilized experiential methods like community mapping and storytelling. For example, one lecturer in Indonesia used wayang kulit to spark discussions about leadership, justice, and ethical decision-making. Students reported that these sessions were intellectually stimulating and emotionally engaging, as they connected timeless moral questions to familiar cultural symbols. This aligns with Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory, which highlights critical reflection and contextual meaning-making as key to identity formation and empowerment.

However, these innovative practices mostly remain individual efforts and have not been institutionalized. While they show the potential of civics education to engage students in culturally relevant dialogues, they also reveal a concerning reliance on personal initiative rather than systemic support. Lecturers who implement culturally responsive methods often lack formal training, curricular resources, or institutional recognition. As noted by Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (2021), culturally responsive teaching needs support from intentional policy frameworks and professional development to move beyond isolated efforts and encourage collective change across departments.

These findings highlight the urgent need for institutions to create an environment where innovation can flourish, be shared, and be improved. Civic education in a multicultural society cannot depend solely on exceptional teaching. The next section will explore students' perspectives, detailing how they navigate, negotiate, and respond to the current state of civic education and their visions for a more inclusive and relevant future of learning.

### **4.3 Student Perspectives**

Student perspectives gathered in this study provide valuable insights into the experiences of young people navigating civic identity in multicultural societies. In both Indonesian and Malaysian universities, students consistently expressed a desire for more culturally responsive and inclusive civic learning experiences. They criticized existing curricular content as too abstract, legalistic, and disconnected from their daily lives in diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. This disconnect is similar to findings from other studies in African higher education, where students have also expressed frustration with civic education that emphasizes state narratives at the cost of cultural diversity and grassroots civic experiences (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2020).

Moreover, students clearly wanted civic education that not only covers knowledge of governance systems but also prepares them to navigate real-world diversity. They highlighted the importance of learning about intercultural dialogue, social empathy, and civic responsibility in diverse contexts. For instance, students from indigenous and minority backgrounds noted the exclusion of their histories and civic contributions from classroom narratives, contributing to feelings of invisibility and marginalization. This is concerning in societies where democratic participation and social cohesion depend on intergroup understanding and recognition (Banks, 2019). When civic education ignores these aspects, it risks reinforcing social hierarchies instead of challenging them.

In their reflections, students noted instances of transformative learning when lecturers included culturally relevant content or invited them to share personal stories. Assignments that encouraged storytelling, community engagement, or comparative analysis of civic traditions were seen as empowering and intellectually stimulating. These experiences affirmed their cultural identities and helped them view civic participation as dynamic and linked to their heritage. Such moments align with Freire et al.'s (2020) idea of education as a dialogic process, where learners actively co-create knowledge rather than passively receive state-defined norms.

These student perspectives collectively underscore a critical conclusion: reforming civic education cannot happen solely through policy mandates or top-down curriculum changes. It requires actively listening to students and co-creating spaces that not only acknowledge their cultural realities but center them in the educational process. In the concluding section, we argue that institutional change, guided by student agency and rooted in principles of decolonization and epistemic justice, is vital for establishing a genuinely inclusive civic education ecosystem in higher education.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings reveal a noticeable gap between the goals of civic education policies and the realities faced by students in multicultural and multiethnic learning environments. National curricula often strive to create a unified sense of national identity, but they unintentionally overlook the cultural diversity that defines many student groups. This disconnect is particularly concerning in areas with a history of marginalization and cultural fragmentation. Focusing on a uniform national narrative can silence minority voices (Banks, 2019). Instead of building a shared democratic culture, these methods may perpetuate systemic exclusions and increase civic disengagement among marginalized youth.

This suggests that effectively integrating cultural literacy into civic education requires more than just including diverse cultural elements. As Zembylas (2015b) suggests, educators should engage in "pedagogies of strategic empathy." These approaches not only acknowledge cultural differences but also question historical injustices and develop critical awareness. This approach urges teachers to go beyond simply sharing knowledge and instead facilitate ethical interactions across cultural divides. Such changes are crucial for making classrooms inclusive civic spaces where students' identities are truly recognized and valued.

Additionally, rethinking civic education with a cultural literacy perspective demands a major shift in its purpose. Rather than just producing obedient and loyal citizens, the aim should be to develop civic actors who are critically aware, socially responsible, and able to navigate complex cultural landscapes with empathy and justice (Levinson, 2011). This aligns with global calls for education systems to meet the needs of

democratic pluralism by promoting intercultural understanding and ethical engagement (Unesco, 2021). In this context, cultural literacy becomes not just a teaching tool but a vital democratic necessity.

To drive this transformation, teacher education must also change. Preservice and in-service programs need to incorporate critical cultural pedagogy into their structures, enabling educators to reflect on their roles and the power dynamics present in their teaching methods (Howard, 2019). Without this foundational training, attempts to introduce cultural literacy may be shallow or even reinforce dominant ideologies under the pretense of being inclusive. Empowering educators is essential, as they can meaningfully adapt curricula, create engaging learning environments, and demonstrate civic empathy in practice.

Finally, institutional support and policy reform are essential for sustaining these teaching innovations. Schools need access to culturally relevant materials, inclusive policies, and community engagement strategies that reflect their students' cultural realities. Moreover, assessment methods should evolve to measure not only cognitive understanding of civic knowledge but also emotional and ethical aspects of civic participation (Osler & Starkey, 2018). Without structural change, even the best-intentioned educational shifts may fail due to rigid systems.

In conclusion, closing the gap between civic education and cultural diversity requires a multi-faceted approach. This approach must include strategic empathy in teaching, a new definition of civic education goals, revamped teacher training, and supportive institutional frameworks. Such a comprehensive strategy promises not only more inclusive education but also the development of a generation of civic actors who view diversity as a democratic resource rather than a challenge.

## **6. Policy and Pedagogical Implications**

The insights from this study serve as a strong call to action for policymakers and educators to rethink civic education with a focus on inclusion, cultural responsiveness, and social justice. Traditional civic curricula, often shaped by postcolonial legacies and inherited nationalistic objectives, should be reconsidered to better reflect the real experiences of diverse student populations. In many African and postcolonial contexts, current civic frameworks typically favor dominant cultural narratives while neglecting the perspectives and histories of indigenous, ethnic, and religious minorities. This disconnect limits students' understanding of civic issues, impairing their sense of belonging and agency in the democratic process.

To address these issues, education policies should prioritize incorporating local cultural knowledge and indigenous governance models into national curricula. Acknowledging and valuing communal decision-making, ancestral knowledge, and indigenous ethics can empower students to see themselves as valid contributors to civic life. When students interact with civic concepts that resonate with their cultural identities, they are more likely to connect meaningfully with the subject and take ownership of their civic roles. This localized approach to civic education does not reject national identity but rather expands it to include the rich complexities of various cultural heritages.

At the same time, teaching practices need to evolve to support this change. Teachers play a key role in translating policy into classroom experiences and require the autonomy and preparation to teach in culturally responsive ways. Professional development programs should focus on more than just technical skills; they should also equip educators with tools for critical reflection, intersectional analysis, and dialogic teaching methods. This includes the ability to connect with students' diverse identities and experiences while creating safe spaces for important conversations about power, history, and justice. As Zembylas (2015) highlights, pedagogies of strategic empathy can guide educators through these emotional landscapes and facilitate transformative learning.

Furthermore, civic education should actively address global issues, analyzed from decolonial and non-Western points of view. Topics such as climate justice, migration, digital citizenship, and human rights should be framed within the context of local and global histories of inequality. When students are exposed to civic challenges through perspectives from the Global South, they gain a better understanding of societal interdependence and the necessity for solidarity-based civic engagement. This integration of global and local perspectives enriches civic education and helps foster the kind of critical global citizens that contemporary education aims to cultivate.

To ensure these educational shifts are sustainable, institutional support is crucial. Education ministries must align curricula, assessment methods, and teacher training with inclusive civic values. Universities and teacher training colleges, in particular, should lead the way by incorporating decolonial and culturally relevant perspectives into their programs. Policy changes need to be backed by adequate resources, collaboration among stakeholders, and clear frameworks that guide schools in transforming civic education from a static subject into a dynamic process of empowerment.

In conclusion, the future of civic education in Africa and other postcolonial societies depends on its ability to honor diversity, confront historical injustices, and promote active, ethical participation in democratic life. Policy reform and teaching innovation must go hand in hand; one provides the framework while the other breathes life into it. Together, they can create civic learning environments where all students feel valued, acknowledged, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to society and the world.

### ***6.1 Curriculum Reform***

Curriculum reform is a key entry point for turning civic education into a more inclusive, relevant, and empowering experience. Education ministries and universities must take proactive steps to revise civic education frameworks to better resonate with the experiences of diverse learners. This means intentionally including local cultural knowledge and indigenous governance systems that reflect the historical, ethical, and communal foundations of African societies. Indigenous practices like consensus-building, elder councils, and restorative justice embody civic values and provide viable models for participatory democracy. When students encounter these systems in their education, they begin to see their cultural heritage not as a relic of the past but as a vital part of civic life today.

In addition to grounding the curriculum in local traditions, it is equally important to incorporate intersectional perspectives that enable students to examine how identity, citizenship, and power intersect in their daily lives. This broadens the understanding of civic participation by acknowledging that factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, and ability influence one's civic opportunities and responsibilities. Moreover, civic education should expand to discuss global issues ranging from climate justice to human rights, presenting these topics through decolonial and non-Western frameworks. By framing global challenges within alternative knowledge systems and experiences, students can critically engage with the world beyond dominant narratives. Therefore, curriculum reform should not just add new content but fundamentally rethink civic learning as a plural, reflective, and justice-centered practice.

### ***6.2 Teacher Training and Institutional Support***

Lecturers should receive training in intercultural pedagogy, culturally responsive assessment methods, and community-focused learning approaches. Institutions should encourage innovation and provide platforms for collaboration. Turning civic education into a more inclusive and empowering process cannot happen without equipping educators, particularly lecturers and teacher trainers, with the necessary skills and perspectives for this change. Ongoing, meaningful training in intercultural pedagogy, culturally responsive assessment, and community-engaged learning should be provided to educators. Such training goes beyond teaching techniques; it invites educators to reflect on their roles, question power dynamics within the classroom, and co-create learning environments that validate diverse cultural backgrounds. By nurturing these critical teaching skills, lecturers can exhibit the civic values of empathy, dialogue, and justice that they aim to instill in their students.

Moreover, institutional support is crucial for ensuring that such educational changes are initiated and maintained. Universities and teacher training colleges must create environments that encourage innovation. This includes providing incentives for lecturers who adopt culturally responsive practices and offering platforms for interdisciplinary collaboration that link civic education with fields like anthropology, history, environmental studies, and gender studies. When institutions actively promote these cross-disciplinary discussions and support educators in their experiments, they help ground civic education in the real-world complexities it seeks to address. Ultimately, systemic support for educators ensures that curriculum reform is not an isolated effort but part of a collective and ongoing transformation of disciplinary collaboration.

### 6.3 Student Agency

A genuinely transformative approach to civic education should position students not just as recipients of knowledge but as co-creators of meaning and civic insights. Students come with a wealth of lived experiences, cultural stories, and community knowledge that can greatly enrich classroom discussions, given the opportunity to share. To honor this, educators must adopt participatory teaching methods that actively involve students in shaping the civic learning process. Strategies such as service learning, cultural exchange forums, and peer-to-peer discussions allow students to connect theory with their real-life experiences, think critically about their social roles, and develop a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the classroom. When students are seen as partners in learning, their agency is strengthened, and their potential for civic leadership increases.

To deepen this commitment to student agency, course design should become a more collaborative and dynamic process. Rather than relying on fixed syllabi that dictate what civic knowledge should look like, educators can invite students to help establish learning objectives, curate community-based projects, or contribute to curricular content that reflects their interests and concerns. This shift not only democratizes the learning environment but also embodies the principles of civic engagement that education seeks to promote. Furthermore, embedding student agency within the teaching structure sends a clear message that learners are not passive observers; they are empowered actors capable of imagining and enacting social change. Thus, advancing student agency is both a teaching and political action, one that redefines education as a space for dialogue, justice, and collective transformation.

## 7. Conclusion

A transformative rethinking of civic education through incorporating cultural literacy in higher education is essential. This approach not only reflects the socio-cultural realities of the Global South but also prepares students to become inclusive, ethical, and engaged citizens in a rapidly changing society. Civic education, when grounded in local knowledge, intersectional viewpoints, and decolonial global perspectives, can move beyond abstract ideals to become a living, participatory experience for students.

Achieving this vision requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels: policy reforms that embrace cultural diversity, institutional frameworks that support innovative teaching, educator training focused on empathy and responsiveness, and learning environments that respect student voices and agency. When higher education institutions recognize diversity as a civic resource rather than an obstacle, they fulfill their democratic mission, nurturing graduates who are not only informed but also empowered to shape a fair and inclusive society. The work ahead is tough but important. It starts with rethinking education as a space where everyone feels like they belong and can grow

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