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## Critical literacy of young citizens in the digital era

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## Critical literacy of young citizens in the digital era

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### Abstract

Today's young citizens are categorised as Generation Z. They are very closely related to gadgets and are often called digital natives. Currently, the number of young citizens dominates the Indonesian population, so young citizens need critical literacy to respond to any information critically. This study aimed to determine the level of critical literacy of young citizens. The research approach is descriptive and quantitative, with data collected using a survey questionnaire from senior high school students in Indramayu Regency, Indonesia. The research results are as follows: making decisions based on data is classified as excellent at 70%; being communicative and tolerant of differences at 73.1%; taking concrete action for a better life for all is 33.7%. Based on these findings, critical literacy needs to be continuously improved, including the use of learning resources and learning media that encourage the use of digital technology.

**Keywords:** critical literacy; digital era; young citizen.

### Introduction

Critical literacy is the ability to criticise various problems in the context of social life and actively participate in solving these problems (Luke, 2014). Critical literacy is critical for young



citizens to support democratic life. Through critical literacy, citizens can criticise various unequal and unfair realities in various fields of life, whether political, economic, socio-cultural, or others, and participate in solving these problems (Frey & Fisher, 2015). As the nation's next generation, young citizens have an important role in creating a better and equal life for all through active participation in social life, including using information and communication technology.

Young citizens are very closely associated with gadgets. Advances in information technology provide enormous opportunities for young citizens to access information, communicate, and more (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2013; Halimi et al., 2022). The enormous use of information technology by young citizens to access information or communicate can be seen in the Central Bureau of Statistics for 2020 data.

Table 1.  
*Internet use according to education level*

Level	Year 2018	Year 2020
Primary School	16.64%	35.97%
Junior high school	62.77%	73.40%
Senior High School	85.52%	91.01%
College	94.41%	95.30%

*Resource: (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2020).*

This data is in line with the findings of research conducted by Machfiroh, Sapriya & Komalasari in 2018 in the city of Bandung, showing that 100% of students in the senior high schools studied use the internet and have social media, with a percentage of 85% of them having the characteristic of always being curious about various information and events (Machfiroh et al., 2018).

Based on these findings, critical literacy is important for young citizens, considering that advances in technology provide vast opportunities for them to access a variety of information with various messages, perspectives and basic ideologies (Angga Rini, 2018). To form a democratic citizen, critical literacy is needed (Loring, 2017). In the digital era, civic education must prepare the younger generation to take advantage of information technology advances and participate in various meaningful activities to encourage a more just and democratic life (Heggart & Flowers, 2019). critical literacy is related to the ability to investigate the reality of life, identify multiple perspectives, communicate ideas, and identify and create opportunities to improve a better life individually or collectively (Boix Mansilla & Bughin, 2011). Therefore, the researcher decided to research urgently the critical literacy of young citizens in the digital age. In general, the benefits of this study provide an overview of the important role of Civic Education in using a critical literacy approach so that students are ready to respond to advances in information technology in supporting a democratic life in local, national and global contexts.

The results of this research contribute to the development of civic education by using a critical literacy approach in the implementation of civic education learning so that students actively support democratic practices by critically responding to various problems such as injustice, marginalisation, discrimination, and other problems in local, national, and global contexts using digital technology. Critical literacy in global civic education encourages a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues in modern society (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2014).

## Method

This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. According to Gall et al. (2007), the survey is one of the research methods in education used to discover certain problems in education. This research was conducted in Indramayu Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The sample in this study was senior high school students from Indramayu Regency. The number of samples in this study is 110 students. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire sheet to determine the critical literacy level of the high school students studied. The procedures in this research are identifying the problem, conducting a literature review,

determining the research focus, and arranging the research instrument in a questionnaire. The researcher gave a questionnaire via a Google form to be responded to by the research sample students. Analysis of the data used is descriptive quantitative, using the percentage of the data obtained.

## Result and Discussion

This study's critical literacy in young citizens was developed from Mansilla & Jackson (Boix Mansilla & Bughin, 2011). The following relates to the critical literacy of young citizens in this study, namely the ability to make decisions based on data, communicative and tolerant of differences, and the ability to take real personal or collective action to promote social change that is more equitable for all parties. The data obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Ability to make decisions based on data*

Components Assessed	Aspect Assessed	Results			
		Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Enough (%)	Less (%)
Make decisions based on data	Judging someone not based on their background nor based on gender differences	71.4	12	14.6	2
	non-discriminatory on any grounds including on the basis of gender	73	14	10	3
	Treat others equally not based on inherent stereotypes including on the basis of gender stereotypes	69.3	21.3	7	2.4
	Treat others fairly not based on gender roles	65.4	27	5	2.6
	Provide an objective assessment of everyone, both male and female	70.9	20	6.4	2.7
Average score		70	18.9	8.6	2.6

From these results, it is known that the ability to judge other people not based on background or other differences, including gender differences, with a very good score of 71.4%; non-discriminatory got a very good score of 73%; treat others equally and not based on gender stereotypes get a good score of 69.3%; As for the ability to treat others fairly, the score was very good, namely 65.4%; and the ability to assess objectively, with very good score namely 70.9%.

Table 3.

*Communicative and tolerant of difference*

Components Assessed	Aspect Assessed	Results			
		Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Enough (%)	Less (%)
Communicative and Tolerant of Difference	Able to express opinions personally and publicly both directly and through social media	62.2	22.2	14.7	0.9
	Can respect the opinions or thoughts of others either directly or through social media	70.4	14.5	10.4	4.7
	Understand that everyone, both male and female, has an equal position	76.7	10.3	10	3
Average Score		70	15.6	11.7	2.7

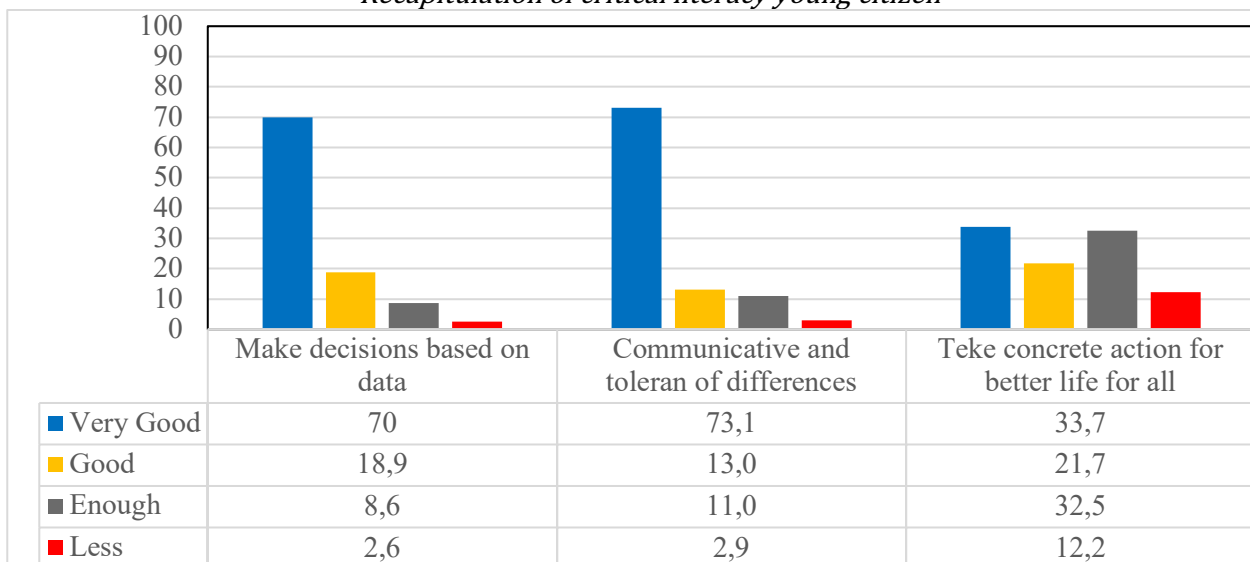
The table above shows that the score is very good for the ability to express opinions, that is 62.2%; the ability to respect the opinions of others directly or through social media obtained a very good score, that is 70.4%; and understand that everyone has an equal position get a very good score, that is 76.7%.

Table 4  
*Able To Take Concrete Actions Personally and Collectively*

Components Assessed	Aspects Assessed	Results			
		Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Enough (%)	Less (%)
Able to take concrete actions personally/collectively to encourage a more Just and equal life for all parties	Expressing condemnation of violence and injustice including gender injustice that occurs through social media	46.2	25.7	20.4	7.7
	Campaigning for justice including justice on the basis of gender through social media	30.8	19	39.7	10.5
	Create content on social media to voice equality including gender equality	32.8	28.6	30.4	8.2
	Engage in campaigns through social media against violence including gender-based violence	28.7	19.2	40.8	11.3
	Actively participate in social activities	29.9	15.9	29.9	23.2
Average Score		21.7	32.5	12.2	33.7

From the table 4, it is known that the score is very good for the ability to convey criticism of various forms of injustice that occur, including injustice based on gender by 46.2%; the excellent score for engagement in campaigning for a fairer life for all through social media, namely 30.8%; a very good score for involvement in creating content on social media to voice equality and justice, including gender justice, which is 32.8%; an excellent score for campaigning against various forms of violence including gender violence through social media, namely 28.9%; and an excellent score for involvement in social activities at 29.9%. The research findings are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.  
*Recapitulation of critical literacy young citizen*



Based on the research findings, the following points can be discussed, *first*, the young citizens in this study generally can make decisions based on data, not subjective judgments. This result aligns with Rini opinion that critical literacy relates to a person's ability to critically ascertain the truth of information by paying attention to the various perspectives underlying the information (2018). Critical literacy relates to a person's ability to find the truth or meaning of information based on critical analysis results, not assumptions or subjective opinions (Gaber & Hassan, 2015). A similar opinion was conveyed by Provenzo and Apple (2005) that the ability to make decisions objectively, based on critical analysis of the information obtained, varied and not based on stereotypes or subjective judgments is part of critical literacy (Provenzo & Apple,

2005). Access to information and communication technology is very wide and massive, so critical literacy is important to be taught to students as young citizens. Through critical literacy, students learn that their lives cannot be separated from various influences such as politics, economics, and socio-culture (Soares & Wood, 2010). Having the ability to make judgments and decisions objectively, not based on subjective views, is important for everyone, especially young citizens who have a very wide range of physical and virtual, and this ability is one of the signs of critical literacy.

*Second*, these results indicate that the young citizens involved in this study have good skills in communicating with other parties and are tolerant of differences. These results, particularly about the ability to communicate through social media, are confirmed by Ayu Dewi's findings that young citizens in Indonesia cannot be separated from the internet (Dewi et al., 2021). The ability to be open to differences and to accept different views is an important part of critical literacy, which underlies a person to be actively involved in various social activities that encourage change both locally, nationally and globally, directly or by utilizing information and communication technology (Bean & Dunkerly-Bean, 2020). A similar view was put forward by Gregory & Cahill that the ability to be open to diversity of opinions and thoughts is part of critical literacy that students need to have as young citizens, and education has an important role in shaping this ability (Gaber & Hassan, 2015). By having critical literacy, a person has an openness to various thoughts and views that are influenced by differences such as socio-cultural background, political identity, economic status, and level of education, thus giving birth to tolerance for diversity (Spector et al., 2014). The ability to communicate and express opinions is part of the rights in a democratic country. Therefore, education, especially teachers, have an important role in shaping students' understanding of various realities of socio-political life so that they can express their opinions appropriately (O'Quinn, 2005). Difference, as a reality of life that cannot be avoided, requires being open to differences and tolerant of diversity.

*Third*, the results of this study indicate that critical literacy is needed as a tool for individuals and collectively to challenge inequality and social injustice so that the existence of minority groups is recognized and represented in a social system (Janks, 2000). Advances in information technology provide a very broad space for young citizens to be actively involved in efforts to encourage more equitable changes for all parties after going through critical studies regarding the problems sought to be resolved (Amgott, 2018). In this case, critical literacy relates to a person's involvement in overcoming various problems. Therefore, critical literacy is very necessary considering that various kinds of problems in local, national and global contexts require the involvement of all parties collaboratively to overcome them (Bean & Dunkerly-Bean, 2020). In a democratic society, critical literacy is very important to be taught in education; through critical literacy, students are formed to be open and respect differences and not "silent" on issues of injustice experienced by minorities by trying to take part in making life changes to be more democratic, and equal for all groups including those in minority positions (Pandya et al., 2021).

Critical literacy is not only about making decisions objectively and being tolerant of differences. Critical literacy is also related to the ability to take concrete actions to encourage social change. In today's digital era, a systematic approach is needed to form critical literacy so students can use technology appropriately to express ideas and participate digitally (Wohlwend & Lewis, 2010). Critical literacy plays a very important role in education, namely in forming students who are critical in responding to various problems of injustice that exist in people's lives and actively strive to create a just and equal society (Vasquez et al., 2019). It can be emphasised that, in the digital era, critical literacy is a means for students not only to be active in various activities at the national and global levels but also to be critically part of efforts to create a more just and equal life for all parties, by utilising advances in information and communication technology (Gounari, 2009).

The low involvement of young citizens to actively participate in creating change indicates that critical literacy needs to continue to be taught to young citizens. Critical literacy is very important to use in social studies, including civic education, to form critical and democratic citizens and support global citizenship that is fair, equal, and without discrimination (Beaudry, 2015). Global citizenship education encourages student participation in solving problems in local and global contexts (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

Critical literacy is important for young citizens because it is not only related to the ability to read texts and unequal realities critically, but it encourages concrete actions to overcome these problems, both directly and digitally. Information and communication technology can effectively motivate young citizens to participate in voicing social change for a better life. Based on the conclusion of this study, the researcher recommends that Civic Education teachers, in organising civic education learning, are expected to apply critical literacy to prepare students as digital natives to become critical citizens and actively fight for a better and democratic life for all.

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