



The internalization of democratic values among junior high school students in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province

Husain N. Kaharu^{1*}, Udin Hamim², Ramli Mahmud³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

Email: 1716524001@mahasiswa.ung.ac.id, udinhamim@ung.ac.id, ramlimahmud33@ung.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the internalization of democratic values in junior secondary schools in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency, using a case study of SMP Negeri 1 Kabila, SMP Negeri 2 Kabila, and SMP Negeri 3 Kabila. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the internalization of democratic values is reflected in students' participation in school democratic processes, freedom of expression, and equality of rights within the school environment. These values are implemented through classroom learning, student organizations, and school culture. However, several factors hinder their effective implementation, including limited training for teachers and students regarding democratic values, resistance rooted in hierarchical school culture, disparities in educational infrastructure, and insufficient evaluation and monitoring of democratic practices. This study is expected to provide evaluative insights for schools in strengthening democratic education.



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INTRODUCTION

Democratic education constitutes a fundamental element in shaping participatory, just, and responsible citizens. Within the context of Indonesia's national education system, Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System stipulates that education must be conducted in a democratic, equitable, and non-discriminatory manner in order to develop learners' potential as democratic citizens. This legal framework highlights that education is not only aimed at intellectual development, but also at fostering attitudes, values, and behaviors that support democratic life. Through democratic learning environments, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking, mutual respect, and the ability to engage constructively with diverse perspectives.

In line with this perspective, Biesta (2019) emphasizes that democratic education functions not merely to transmit civic knowledge, but also to cultivate democratic subjects who are capable of acting ethically and reflectively within the public sphere. From this standpoint, schools are expected to serve as spaces where democratic values are practiced in everyday interactions, rather than being limited to theoretical instruction. Consequently, schools are positioned not simply as sites of knowledge transmission, but as social arenas in which values such as equality, freedom of expression, participation, and respect for human rights can be meaningfully developed and experienced by students in their daily school life.

Globally, democratic education is understood as a process of internalizing democratic values and practices through authentic learning experiences. John Dewey asserted that schools should function as miniature democratic societies, where students learn democracy through direct engagement in collaborative social activities. Dewey's perspective is reinforced by recent empirical studies demonstrating that experiential learning and genuine student participation significantly enhance civic engagement and students' democratic dispositions (Knowles et al., 2018; Veugelers & de Groot, 2019). From this perspective, democracy cannot be effectively taught as a purely normative concept; rather, it must be experienced as a lived practice through social interaction, open dialogue, and collective decision-making. Nevertheless, a growing body of empirical research indicates that the implementation

of democratic education in schools continues to face substantial challenges. Studies by Schuitema et al. (2007) and Torney-Purta (2002) reveal that teaching practices in many schools remain dominated by hierarchical and cognitively oriented approaches, thereby limiting opportunities for meaningful student participation. Democratic education is often reduced to theoretical content within specific subjects, rather than being integrated holistically into school culture. As a result, democratic values are weakly internalized, as evidenced by students' limited willingness to express opinions, minimal involvement in school decision-making processes, and the persistence of exclusive or discriminatory behaviors in school settings.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government, through the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), emphasizes the importance of experiential learning in fostering democratic character. Conceptually, this approach aligns with theories of character and citizenship education that position social experience as a primary medium for value formation (Arthur et al., 2015). The Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes global diversity, mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, and independence, reflects key dimensions of twenty-first-century civic competence. However, recent studies suggest that project-based policy initiatives are effective only when they are contextually integrated into the cultural and social realities of schools (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Sant et al., 2018). In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, democratic education grounded in local wisdom has become increasingly relevant. Research by Banks (2008) and Neoh (2021) highlights that culturally responsive democratic education enhances students' sense of belonging, social empathy, and community cohesion. Local wisdom embodies social values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberation and solidarity, which are closely aligned with the principles of deliberative democracy. This approach enables students to understand democracy not as an abstract concept, but as a social practice embedded in their everyday lives.

The ideas of Henry B. Mayo and Iyman Towel Sergeant, which emphasize citizen participation, equality of rights, and responsible freedom, are further supported by contemporary scholarship on democratic citizenship. Empirical findings by Isac et al. (2014) indicate that participatory experiences grounded in shared values and social justice significantly contribute to the development of students' democratic attitudes. Thus, integrating local wisdom into learning not only strengthens cultural identity but also deepens substantive democratic practices within schools. Despite these insights, empirical studies that specifically examine democratic education based on local wisdom at the secondary education level remain limited. Most existing research focuses on policy frameworks or curriculum design, without sufficiently exploring the processes through which democratic values are internalized through concrete learning practices and everyday social interactions within schools (Sant et al., 2018). Moreover, structural challenges such as limited teacher literacy in democratic pedagogy, persistent hierarchical school cultures, and weak evaluation and monitoring systems continue to hinder the effective implementation of democratic education.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara emphasized that education should guide the holistic development of learners' character, intellect, and physical capacities in order to foster individuals who are free and socially responsible. This perspective aligns with humanistic-democratic education approaches that position students as active subjects in the learning process (Noddings, 2010). Schools, therefore, must function as safe, inclusive, and dialogical spaces, where teachers act as facilitators who cultivate democratic climates through modeling, collaboration, and respect for students' voices. Although democratic education has been extensively examined from the perspectives of policy, curriculum, and civic pedagogy, existing studies remain largely dominated by normative and macro-level approaches, focusing primarily on program design or formal learning outcomes. Empirical research that investigates the processes through which democratic values are internalized via concrete learning practices rooted in local school wisdom remains relatively limited, particularly at the primary and secondary education levels. Moreover, most previous studies have not sufficiently explored how culturally grounded learning experiences can function as a sustained medium for the formation of democratic dispositions, rather than merely as symbolic or ceremonial activities.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by positioning local wisdom not merely as a contextual supplement, but as a core strategy in democratic education within schools. Specifically, this research examines how democratic values such as participation, equality, freedom of

expression, and social responsibility are internalized through contextual learning experiences grounded in local socio-cultural practices. By holistically examining learning processes, social interactions, and school culture, this study contributes to the development of a contextualized model of democratic education that bridges global democratic theory, national education policy, and the socio-cultural realities of schools. This contribution is expected to enrich the scholarship on democratic education, particularly in multicultural contexts, while also providing practical implications for fostering authentic and sustainable democratic cultures in educational settings.

This study aims to describe and analyze the internalization of democratic values among junior secondary school students in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency. The research focuses on how democratic values such as participation, equality, and freedom of expression are introduced and practiced within the school environment. Using a case study approach, this study examines three schools, namely SMP Negeri 1 Kabila, SMP Negeri 2 Kabila, and SMP Negeri 3 Kabila, to understand how democratic principles are implemented through classroom learning, student activities, and school policies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a field research design to explore the implementation and internalization of democratic values in junior high schools in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency. This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Kabila, SMP Negeri 2 Kabila, and SMP Negeri 3 Kabila, which were selected based on accessibility, data availability, and the emergence of current social phenomena related to democratic practices in the school environment. Data collection was carried out starting in October 2024 and continued iteratively to ensure data saturation.

The researcher acted as the primary research instrument and adopted a participant-observer role, allowing for in-depth engagement with the school environment. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, field notes, and literature review. Key informants included school principals, vice principals, civic education teachers, student organization advisors, and students. Observations focused on classroom interactions, school activities, and everyday practices reflecting democratic values such as participation, equality, deliberation, and freedom of expression. Relevant documents including school policies, learning plans, student activity records, and archival materials were analyzed to complement and validate primary data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data were systematically coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the internalization of democratic values in school contexts. The credibility of the findings was ensured through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checking with key informants. These strategies enhanced the trustworthiness, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study reveal that junior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama/SMP*) in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency have undertaken various efforts to foster democratic values among students, particularly participation, freedom of expression, and equality. These efforts are primarily implemented through classroom learning processes, student organizations, and everyday school culture. Within the Indonesian education system, the development of these values is also aligned with national educational goals that emphasize character formation and civic responsibility. Schools therefore play an important role in creating learning environments that allow students to practice democratic behaviors in their daily interactions. Nevertheless, the degree to which these values are internalized among students varies considerably and is influenced by several contextual and structural factors, including teaching approaches, institutional culture, teacher–student relationships, and the broader school climate that either encourages or limits open participation.

The promotion of student participation is mainly facilitated through interactive learning strategies such as group discussions, collaborative assignments, classroom deliberations, student council (*Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah/OSIS*) activities, and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Through these activities, teachers attempt to create learning environments that encourage students to be more actively involved in the learning process rather than remaining passive recipients of knowledge. Students are given opportunities to ask questions, express their opinions, and contribute ideas during classroom interactions, which can help develop confidence and communication skills. In addition, participation is also fostered through collective decision-making practices at a basic level, such as determining group roles, organizing class tasks, or planning classroom activities together. These practices aim to introduce students to democratic values by allowing them to experience participation as part of everyday learning activities within the school environment, thereby helping them understand democracy not only as a political concept but also as a practical way of interacting with others in a shared social space.

Observational data indicate that these participatory practices provide students with opportunities to directly experience democratic processes. However, the level of participation among students remains uneven. While some students actively engage in discussions and classroom decision-making, others tend to remain passive and reluctant to speak. This condition is often influenced by several factors, including limited self-confidence, inadequate communication skills, and long-standing learning habits that place teachers as the central authority in the classroom. As a result, students may feel hesitant to express their ideas or challenge existing opinions. These findings suggest that although participatory strategies have been introduced in classroom practices, they have not yet fully developed into a deeply embedded participatory culture within the school environment.

Freedom of expression is encouraged through various school activities, including classroom discussions, question-and-answer sessions, student meetings, and deliberative forums within student organizations. Through these platforms, teachers attempt to create a relatively open and dialogical classroom atmosphere where students are given opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, and constructive criticism. Students are encouraged to participate actively in academic and non-academic discussions, share their perspectives on certain issues, and respond to the opinions of their peers. These activities are intended to foster a learning environment that supports openness, respect for diverse viewpoints, and democratic interaction among students. Despite these efforts, the internalization of freedom of expression has not yet been fully realized. In many classroom situations, interactions tend to be dominated by a small number of outspoken and confident students, while others remain hesitant to speak. Several factors contribute to this situation, including fear of making mistakes, social pressure from peers, and concerns about how teachers or classmates might respond to their opinions. Interviews with students also reveal that the lack of consistent follow-up on the ideas or suggestions they express often reduces their motivation to participate in discussions. As a result, some students perceive that their voices have limited impact on school decisions or classroom dynamics, which ultimately weakens their willingness to actively express their opinions.

Equality is promoted through teachers' efforts to provide equal learning opportunities, fair assessment practices, and non-discriminatory treatment regardless of students' academic ability, gender, or socio-economic background. Schools formally emphasize equal rights and obligations for all students, particularly during learning activities and school programs. However, empirical evidence shows that equality is not always realized in practice. More active or academically successful students often receive greater attention during discussions and leadership opportunities, while quieter students are less visible. In some cases, the selection of class leaders or student council members is influenced by popularity and social networks rather than deliberative and inclusive processes, which weakens the substantive meaning of equality.

Table 1 summarizes the main strategies employed by schools and the empirical conditions observed in relation to democratic values.

Table 1 Strategies and Empirical

Democratic Values	School Strategies	Empirical Conditions
Participation	Group discussions, P5 projects, OSIS activities	Participation exists but is uneven
Freedom of expression	Classroom dialogue, student forums	Dominated by outspoken students
Equality	Equal access to learning and assessment	Informal inequalities persist

In addition to identifying the strategies implemented by schools to promote democratic values, this study also reveals several factors that hinder the effective internalization of these values in junior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama/SMP*) across Kabila District. These inhibiting factors operate at multiple levels, including pedagogical, cultural, individual, and structural dimensions. Such complexities indicate that the development of democratic values in schools cannot rely solely on formal programs or activities, but must also address deeper systemic conditions that shape teaching practices and school interactions.

From a pedagogical perspective, many teachers have limited exposure to democratic pedagogy and participatory teaching approaches. As a result, classroom practices still tend to be teacher-centered, where the teacher plays a dominant role in delivering information while students are positioned primarily as passive recipients of knowledge. Learning activities often emphasize the completion of curriculum targets and mastery of academic content rather than encouraging dialogical interaction, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. Moreover, the lack of systematic professional development related to democratic education limits teachers' capacity to design learning environments that consistently promote participation, equality, and open dialogue among students. Without adequate training and institutional support, teachers may find it difficult to integrate democratic values into everyday classroom practices.

Culturally, school environments tend to maintain hierarchical relationships between teachers and students. Teachers are often perceived as unquestionable authorities, which discourages students from expressing dissenting views or critical opinions. This hierarchical culture limits the development of egalitarian and dialogical interactions that are essential for democratic learning. Student-related factors also play a significant role. Many students demonstrate low self-confidence, limited public speaking skills, and minimal prior experience in participatory settings.

These conditions reduce their willingness to engage actively in democratic practices, even when opportunities are formally provided. Structurally, schools face limitations in terms of supporting facilities and systems. The absence of dedicated spaces for dialogue, limited use of interactive learning media, and weak mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating democratic practices hinder sustainability. Democratic activities are often implemented as isolated events rather than as an integral part of school governance and learning culture.

Table 2 Inhibiting Factors of Democratic Value Internalization

Dimension	Key Barriers
Pedagogical	Teacher-centered instruction, limited training
Cultural	Hierarchical school relationships
Student	Low confidence and communication skills
Structural	Limited facilities and weak evaluation systems

Overall, the findings indicate that while schools in Kabila District have initiated multiple strategies to promote democratic values, these efforts have not yet resulted in deep and consistent internalization. Democratic practices are present at a procedural level but remain fragile in everyday interactions. Addressing these challenges requires a more systematic approach that integrates democratic pedagogy, transforms school culture into a more egalitarian environment, strengthens student capacities, and establishes sustainable institutional support mechanisms. Such efforts are essential to ensure that democratic education moves beyond symbolic implementation toward meaningful and enduring practice within junior secondary schools

Discussion

The findings indicate that junior secondary schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama/SMP*) in Kabila District have consciously attempted to implement democratic education practices within their institutional environment. These practices are reflected in various school activities that promote student participation, freedom of expression, and equality of rights. In classroom settings, teachers often encourage deliberative discussions that allow students to exchange ideas, respond to differing viewpoints, and participate in simple decision-making processes related to learning activities. Beyond the classroom, opportunities for democratic engagement are also provided through student council (*Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah/OSIS*) activities, extracurricular programs, and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Through these programs, students are given space to collaborate, organize activities, and practice leadership, which contributes to their understanding of collective responsibility and shared decision-making within the school community.

These efforts reflect broader contemporary perspectives on democratic education, which emphasize that school function not only as institutions for academic learning but also as civic learning environments where democratic values are nurtured through everyday experiences. Rather than relying solely on formal instruction about democracy in the curriculum, democratic education is more effectively developed when students are actively involved in participatory practices within their daily school life. Such experiences enable students to internalize democratic principles through interaction, cooperation, and dialogue with peers and teachers. This perspective is consistent with scholarly arguments that democratic education should be embedded in school culture and practice, allowing students to experience democracy as a lived reality rather than merely as theoretical knowledge (Biesta, 2020; Sant et al., 2018).

Student participation emerged as a central strategy for democratic value internalization. Opportunities for involvement in decision-making processes such as class meetings, OSIS elections, and collaborative projects reflect an experiential approach to civic learning. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that participatory school practices significantly enhance students' civic agency, sense of belonging, and democratic dispositions when students are meaningfully involved rather than symbolically represented (Schulz et al., 2025). However, this study also reveals that participation remains uneven, as discussions are frequently dominated by more confident or socially prominent students. This pattern confirms findings by Schuitema et al. (2007), who argue that participatory structures alone are insufficient without pedagogical strategies that actively support inclusive engagement.

Freedom of expression is formally encouraged in schools through discussions, aspiration forums, and project-based learning. Nevertheless, many students remain hesitant to voice opinions due to fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, or lack of confidence. This finding aligns with recent research emphasizing the importance of psychological safety and dialogic classroom climates in democratic education (Bialystok & Kukar, 2017; Kullenberg & Marjanovic-Shane, 2023). Studies show that students are more likely to express their views when teachers intentionally foster respectful dialogue, normalize disagreement, and protect minority voices. Without these conditions, freedom of expression risks becoming procedural rather than substantive.

Equality of rights is institutionally promoted through non-discriminatory policies and equal access to learning activities and leadership opportunities within schools. In principle, all students are granted the same rights to participate in classroom discussions, school programs, and organizational structures such as the student council (*Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah/OSIS*). Teachers and school administrators formally emphasize fairness in assessment, classroom participation, and the distribution of learning opportunities. These policies are intended to create an inclusive learning environment in which every student can engage in school activities without discrimination based on academic ability, gender, or socio-economic background.

However, the findings of this study reveal a gap between formal equality and students' lived experiences in everyday school practices. Students with higher academic achievement or stronger communication skills often receive more attention from teachers and are more likely to take on visible roles in discussions and leadership positions. In contrast, quieter students or those with lower confidence

levels tend to remain less involved and sometimes marginalized in participatory activities. This situation suggests that equal opportunities do not automatically lead to equitable participation. Contemporary scholarship on democratic schooling emphasizes that equality must be actively constructed through differentiated pedagogical support, where teachers intentionally create inclusive learning strategies that encourage the participation of all students, particularly those who are less confident or less academically prominent (Carr & Thésée, 2017; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019). Therefore, equality in democratic education requires deliberate facilitation and supportive classroom environments rather than merely providing uniform treatment for all students.

Several interrelated factors hinder the effective internalization of democratic values in the school context. First, limited teacher capacity in democratic pedagogy constrains the quality of participatory learning implemented in classrooms. Many teachers are still more familiar with conventional teaching approaches that emphasize the transmission of knowledge rather than dialogical engagement with students. As a result, learning activities often focus on completing curriculum targets and maintaining classroom order instead of encouraging open discussion, critical questioning, and collaborative decision-making. Recent studies emphasize that teachers require specific professional development to facilitate dialogue, manage diverse opinions, and balance authority with student agency (Biesta, 2006; Schulz et al., 2025). When teachers do not possess these pedagogical competencies, participatory strategies may be implemented only superficially and may easily revert to teacher-centered routines where students play a limited role in the learning process.

Second, hierarchical school cultures continue to shape student behavior, expectations, and interaction patterns within the school environment. In many schools, authority structures remain strongly centralized, with teachers and administrators positioned as the primary decision-makers while students are expected to follow instructions and comply with established rules. Contemporary research on school culture indicates that implicit norms and power relations significantly influence student participation and voice (Ott et al., 2023). These norms can create subtle barriers that discourage students from openly expressing their opinions or questioning existing practices. When students perceive that authority remains firmly controlled by adults, participation may be seen as risky or inappropriate, particularly in situations where expressing different viewpoints could be interpreted as disrespectful. Consequently, even though formal mechanisms for democratic participation such as class discussions, student meetings, or student council activities are available, students may still hesitate to actively engage, reinforcing patterns of passivity within the school community.

Third, infrastructural limitations restrict dialogic and collaborative learning. Studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 period highlight that access to learning spaces, digital resources, and collaborative environments is essential for sustaining democratic practices (Krishnan, 2021; OECD, 2021). Inequitable access to infrastructure exacerbates participation gaps and undermines inclusive democratic engagement. Finally, the absence of systematic evaluation and monitoring weakens democratic education initiatives. Recent literature underscores the importance of formative assessment and reflective evaluation in citizenship education to ensure program effectiveness and sustainability (Liu et al., 2021; Widiyanto & Istiqomah, 2023). Without clear indicators and feedback mechanisms, democratic activities risk becoming routine formalities rather than transformative learning experiences.

Although recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized participatory, dialogic, and experiential approaches to democratic education, existing studies largely focus on policy analysis, curriculum frameworks, or large-scale comparative assessments. Empirical investigations that examine how democratic values are internalized through everyday school practices particularly within culturally specific and hierarchical school contexts remain limited, especially at the junior secondary level in non-Western settings (Biesta, 2006; Schulz et al., 2025). This study addresses this gap by offering a context-sensitive analysis of democratic value internalization grounded in the lived experiences of students and teachers in junior secondary schools. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which examines democratic education not merely as a curricular mandate but as a dynamic interaction among pedagogical practices, school culture, teacher capacity, infrastructure, and evaluation systems. By situating democratic education within local school realities and aligning them with contemporary democratic education theory, this study contributes a contextualized model of democratic schooling that bridges global theoretical discourse and localized educational practice. This contribution provides both

theoretical advancement and practical implications for strengthening sustainable and inclusive democratic cultures in schools.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted only in three junior secondary schools in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study primarily relied on qualitative data obtained through observation and interviews, which may reflect subjective perceptions of participants. Third, the research focused mainly on students and teachers, while perspectives from other stakeholders such as school principals, parents, and local education authorities were not extensively explored. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of investigation by involving a larger number of schools and different educational levels to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of democratic value internalization in schools. Further studies may also adopt mixed-method or quantitative approaches to measure the level of democratic values more systematically. In addition, future research could examine the role of school leadership, parental involvement, and institutional policies in strengthening democratic culture within educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the internalization of democratic values among junior secondary school students in Kabila District, Bone Bolango Regency, focusing on participation, equality, and freedom of expression within everyday school practices. The findings indicate that democratic values have been introduced through instructional activities, student organizations, and deliberative forums such as class meetings and student council elections. These practices provide students with procedural exposure to democratic processes. However, the internalization of democratic values remains limited and largely symbolic. Student participation is often restricted to formal roles, while freedom of expression is constrained by low self-confidence and hierarchical teacher student relations. Decision-making processes are predominantly teacher-driven, positioning students more as implementers than as active democratic agents. Consequently, democratic practices have not yet fully fostered critical engagement or sustained civic agency among students.

Several inhibiting factors were identified, including limited teacher competence in democratic pedagogy, entrenched hierarchical school culture, inadequate institutional support, and the absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms. These conditions hinder the transformation of democratic education from a formal requirement into a lived school culture. The novelty as a contribution of this study lies in its context-sensitive analysis of democratic value internalization in a non-Western junior secondary school setting, emphasizing democratic education as a relational and experiential process. This research contributes to the literature by bridging global democratic education theory with localized school practices and offers practical implications for strengthening inclusive, participatory, and sustainable democratic cultures in schools

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