

From Classroom To Public Space: How Communication Education Shapes Critical Citizenship

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: Apr 15, 2026 Revised: May 14, 2026 Accepted: June 12, 2026</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Communication education Critical citizenship Critical pedagogy Media literacy Public sphere</p>	<p>The transformation of the digital public sphere, marked by polarization, misinformation, and discursive fragmentation, raises fundamental questions about the role of communication education in shaping critical citizenship. This study aims to map how classroom communication education practices transform into citizens' critical participation capacities in the public sphere. The method employed is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA approach, based on 47 Scopus- and Sinta-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2025. The findings reveal four main dimensions connecting communication education with critical citizenship: critical media literacy, dialogic pedagogy, deliberative digital participation, and resistance to dominant discourses. The study concludes that communication education should be reconceptualized as a transformative social praxis, integrating Habermasian public sphere theory, Freirean critical pedagogy, and digital citizenship approaches to address contemporary challenges to deliberative democracy.</p>
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A. Introduction

The structural transformation of the public sphere in the digital era has created a paradox that challenges the foundations of contemporary deliberative democracy. On the one hand, digital platforms have enabled unprecedented citizen participation; on the other, discursive fragmentation, affective polarization, and the circulation of misinformation have weakened the quality of public deliberation (Habermas, 2022; Sander, 2025). Indonesia, as the world's third-largest democracy with more than 212 million internet users, faces serious challenges in maintaining high-quality public discourse amid political hoaxes, hate speech, and algorithms that reinforce epistemic bubbles. In this context, communication education, whether in the form of formal courses, media literacy training, or digital citizenship education, becomes crucial as a symbolic infrastructure that bridges classrooms with public spaces.

Previous studies have extensively discussed the relationship among education, media, and citizen participation, but still employ fragmented approaches. Jerome and Kisby (2024), through a systematic review of 109 articles, found that school ethos and teacher-student relationships significantly influence active citizenship outcomes, yet their study did not specifically examine the communication dimension. Estellés and Doherty (2025) identified four approaches to online safety

education: safeguarding, equipping, empowering, and resisting, but stopped at the digital citizenship framework without further exploring how critical communication competencies are formed. Meanwhile, Fajri, Budimansyah, and Komalasari (2022) conducted a Systematic Literature Review of 41 Scopus articles on digital citizenship in civic education, but the main focus was on conventional citizenship learning rather than communication education as a distinct discipline.

A more fundamental gap appears in the conceptual separation between the classroom as a pedagogical site and the public space as a political arena. Gallagher, Renner, and Glover-Rijkse (2020) showed that public address education integrating digital technology can strengthen civic engagement, but empirical research on how capacity transfers from the classroom to public space systematically remains scarce. Similarly, Bosio and Waghid (2025) articulated six pedagogical priorities for cultivating critical consciousness in Global Citizenship Education, but did not explicitly link communication pedagogy with critical citizenship practices in the Global South context.

In the Indonesian context, Sinta-indexed studies on political communication, digital literacy, and civic education have emerged but rarely employ an integrative framework that connects Habermasian public sphere theory with Freirean critical pedagogy and digital citizenship approaches. Most studies are partially focused on media literacy, character education, or digital participation without mapping transformative pathways that connect these three. As a result, there is a theoretical and empirical gap regarding how communication education, as a cross-border discipline, can serve as an instrument for shaping critical citizens capable of meaningfully participating in the digital public sphere.

The central argument proposed in this article is that communication education has transformative capacity to shape critical citizenship when its pedagogical praxis integrates four mutually supporting dimensions: (1) critical media literacy that transcends technical aspects; (2) dialogic pedagogy positioning students as reflective subjects; (3) deliberative digital participation linking classrooms with public spaces; and (4) resistance to dominant discourses that reproduce inequalities. The hypothesis tested is that integrating these four dimensions produces more robust critical citizenship than partial approaches, as demonstrated by convergent patterns in recent Scopus and Sinta literature.

The specific objectives of this article are: first, to map the conceptual development of the relationship between communication education and critical citizenship in reputable 2015–2025 literature; second, to identify pedagogical dimensions enabling transformation from classroom to public space; third, to describe contradictions and unanswered gaps in the literature; and fourth, to formulate an integrated theoretical framework relevant to the Indonesian context. This article complements existing literature gaps by providing a systematic synthesis across communication, education, and citizenship traditions. This article is structured as follows. After the introduction, the methods section explains the Systematic Literature Review procedure with the PRISMA protocol. The results and discussion section presents findings on the four main dimensions, along with supporting themes, interpreted within public sphere theory, critical pedagogy, and digital citizenship frameworks, and proposes theoretical modifications. The final section presents conclusions and implications for the development of communication education in Indonesia.

B. Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 protocol developed by

Page et al. SLR was chosen because it enables researchers to comprehensively map, evaluate, and synthesize scattered scientific evidence on communication education and critical citizenship using a replicable, transparent procedure. The research design is qualitative-interpretive with thematic synthesis as the main analytical technique, as recommended by Booth et al. for configurative reviews aimed at capturing a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study. The SLR procedure was operationalized through six sequential stages: (1) formulation of review questions; (2) construction of search strategy and selection of databases; (3) determination of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) article selection following PRISMA flow; (5) quality appraisal; and (6) data extraction and thematic synthesis.

Search Strategy and Database Selection

The literature search was conducted from January to March 2025 across seven academic databases that index reputable Scopus and Sinta journals in communication, education, and citizenship studies. The search string was constructed using Boolean operators (AND, OR), combining three thematic clusters: (1) communication education, (2) critical citizenship/public sphere, and (3) pedagogy/classroom. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, in English or Bahasa Indonesia. Table 1 presents the database-specific query strings and the number of records retrieved.

Table 1. Databases, Query Strings, And Initial Records Retrieved

Database	Query String	Initial	Type
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("communication education" OR "media literacy education") AND ("critical citizenship" OR "civic engagement" OR "public sphere") AND (pedagogy OR classroom))	127	International
Web of Science	TS = (("communication education" OR "media literacy") AND ("critical citizenship" OR "civic engagement") AND (pedagogy OR classroom))	94	International
Taylor & Francis	[Abstract: "communication education"] AND [Abstract: "citizenship"] AND [Abstract: pedagogy]	58	International
Sage Journals	("communication education") AND ("public sphere" OR "critical citizenship")	46	International
SpringerLink	"communication education" AND "critical citizenship" AND pedagogy	39	International
ScienceDirect	Title-abstract-keywords: "media literacy education" AND "civic engagement"	31	International
Garuda / Sinta	"pendidikan komunikasi" AND ("kewarganegaraan kritis" OR "literasi media" OR "ruang publik")	43	National
Total		438	

Source: Compiled by authors (2025).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the corpus's relevance and quality, eligibility criteria were established prior to the screening stage. The criteria were developed based on the PICOC (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Context) framework adapted for social sciences. Table 2 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the eligibility stage.

Table 2. Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal article	Editorial, book review, blog, conference proceedings without peer review
Publication year	2015–2025 (last ten years)	Published before 2015
Indexing	Scopus Q1–Q3 or Sinta S1–S3	Predatory journals or unindexed publications
Language	English or Bahasa Indonesia	Other languages without an English abstract
Topical focus	Explicit discussion on communication education and critical citizenship/public sphere	Articles addressing only technology without pedagogical or civic dimensions
Methodology	Empirical (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) or robust conceptual studies	Opinion pieces, news articles, non-academic sources
Accessibility	Full-text accessible	Abstract-only or restricted articles

Source: Adapted from Kitchenham and Charters (2007); Page et al. (2021).

Article Selection: PRISMA Flow

Article selection followed four sequential stages of the PRISMA 2020 flow: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Duplicate removal was performed using Mendeley reference manager. Title and abstract screening were conducted independently by two reviewers, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Full-text reading was performed on potentially eligible articles. Table 3 presents the PRISMA flow with the number of articles at each stage and the reasons for exclusion.

Table 3. PRISMA Flow Of Article Selection

Stage	Activity / Reason for Exclusion	Records	Remaining
Identification	Records identified through database searching	438	438
	Duplicates removed	-72	366
Screening	Title & abstract screening (irrelevant topic, off-scope)	-239	127
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility		127
	Excluded — no explicit communication-education focus	-34	93
	Excluded — no critical citizenship dimension	-21	72
	Excluded — full text inaccessible	-9	63
Quality Appraisal	Excluded — failed CASP threshold (< 6/10)	-16	47
Included	Final articles included in synthesis		47

Source: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, adapted from Page et al. (2021).

Quality Appraisal

To ensure methodological rigor of the included corpus, each of the 63 eligible articles was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) checklist adapted for diverse study

designs. Ten appraisal items were scored on a binary scale (1 = yes, 0 = no/unclear). Articles scoring below 6/10 were excluded. Two reviewers conducted an independent appraisal, and Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.82 indicated strong inter-rater agreement. Table 4 presents the CASP criteria used.

Table 4. CASP Quality Appraisal Criteria

No.	Appraisal Item	Focus
1	Are the research aims clearly stated?	Clarity of objectives
2	Is the methodology appropriate to the research aims?	Methodological fit
3	Is the research design clearly described?	Design transparency
4	Is the sampling strategy explained and justified?	Sampling rigor
5	Is the data collection procedure adequately described?	Data collection
6	Is the relationship between the researcher and participants reflexively addressed?	Reflexivity
7	Have ethical considerations been adequately addressed?	Research ethics
8	Is the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Analytical rigor
9	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Findings clarity
10	How valuable is the contribution of the research?	Theoretical contribution

Source: Adapted from CASP (2018) qualitative research checklist.

Distribution of Included Articles

The final corpus comprises 47 articles distributed across publication years, journal indexing, and methodological approaches. Table 5 presents the distribution of the included articles, providing a transparent overview of the corpus characteristics. The distribution shows a peak in publication during 2020–2023, indicating growing scholarly interest in the relationship between communication education and critical citizenship in the post-pandemic digital era.

Table 5. Distribution Of Included Articles (N = 47)

Category	Sub-Category	n	%
Indexing			
	Scopus Q1	14	29.8%
	Scopus Q2	12	25.5%
	Scopus Q3	6	12.8%
	Sinta S1	9	19.1%
	Sinta S2–S3	6	12.8%
Publication Year			
	2015–2017	5	10.6%
	2018–2019	8	17.0%
	2020–2021	12	25.5%
	2022–2023	14	29.8%

	2024–2025	8	17.0%
Methodology			
	Qualitative	21	44.7%
	Quantitative	12	25.5%
	Mixed methods	8	17.0%
	Conceptual / Theoretical	6	12.8%
Geographic Origin			
	Global North (Europe, North America, Australia)	28	59.6%
	Global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America)	19	40.4%

Source: Compiled by authors based on SLR results (2025).

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

Data extraction was performed using a structured extraction form developed in Microsoft Excel, capturing the following items per article: bibliographic information, research aims, theoretical framework, methodology, sample/context, key findings, and relevance to each review question. Mendeley was used as the reference management tool throughout the process. Data analysis followed the three-stage thematic synthesis procedure of Thomas and Harden: (1) line-by-line coding to identify core concepts in each article; (2) development of descriptive themes through grouping similar codes; and (3) construction of analytical themes that transcend descriptive findings toward theoretical interpretation. Coding was performed using NVivo 12, with the codebook refined iteratively throughout the process. Analytical validity was strengthened through researcher triangulation (Cohen's kappa = 0.82), an audit trail documenting analytical decisions, and member checking through discussions with two communication and education experts. The research was conducted over six months (January–June 2025) with researchers located in Indonesia, providing a Global South perspective in interpreting literature dominated by Global North studies.

C. Result and Discussion

Result

Based on an analysis of 47 articles, four main dimensions were identified that connect communication education to the formation of critical citizenship. The findings are cumulative, meaning each dimension reinforces the others and is not an alternative. The results below are presented in subheadings, followed by an integrative discussion positioning the findings within contemporary theoretical debates.

Critical Media Literacy as Foundation

Twenty-one articles (44.7%) position critical media literacy as the main foundation of communication education for critical citizenship. Tugtekin and Koc (2020) found a significant correlation ($r = 0.67$; $p < 0.001$) between new media literacy, communication skills, and democratic tendencies in a survey of 1,405 students. Similar findings were reported by Notley et al. (2023) in the Australian context with $N = 3,510$, confirming that confidence in media abilities positively correlates with civic engagement. However, the literature shows that critical media literacy cannot be reduced to

a mere technical skill. Emejulu and McGregor (2019) introduced the concept of radical digital citizenship, emphasizing that media literacy education must encompass a critical understanding of the political economy of platforms, algorithmic bias, and the reproduction of structural inequalities. Seven Sinta articles (including those from Jurnal ASPIKOM, Jurnal Komunikator, and Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi) confirm the urgency of critical media literacy in the Indonesian context, particularly regarding political hoaxes and election polarization.

Dialogic Pedagogy in the Classroom

Fifteen articles (31.9%) highlight dialogic pedagogy as the main method facilitating the transition from the classroom to the public space. Gallagher, Renner, and Glover-Rijkse (2020), in a study of public address classes, showed that integrating digital technology into public speaking enhances students' embodied experience, which, in turn, strengthens civic engagement. Dialogic pedagogy rooted in the Freirean tradition positions students as subjects engaged in dialogue with social reality, not merely as recipients of information. Wanders et al. (2020), analyzing 10,000 Dutch students, found that dialogic teacher-student relationships strongly correlated with societal involvement. In higher education communication contexts, Bosio and Waghid (2025) formulated six pedagogical priorities: authentic dialogue, critical reflection, awareness of inequality, transformative action, ethical responsibility, and critical cosmopolitanism.

Deliberative Digital Participation

Seventeen articles (36.2%) examine how communication education facilitates deliberative digital participation. Ohme (2019) showed that the reflective use of digital media influences understanding of citizenship and political participation. Yue, Nekmat, and Beta (2019) in a Southeast Asian study found that digital literacy through digital citizenship strengthens online civic participation among youth minorities. These findings are reinforced by Estellés and Doherty (2025), who, through an SLR of 75 articles, identified four approaches to online education: safeguarding, equipping, empowering, and resisting, with empowering and resisting approaches proving most effective in shaping deliberative participation.

Resistance to Dominant Discourses

The fourth dimension, appearing in twelve articles (25.5%), is the capacity of communication education to build resistance to dominant discourses. Garcia and De Roock (2021) introduced an abolitionist lens in critical digital literacy to challenge power structures. Couldry et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of narrative exchange as a citizenship practice that changes the terms of civic culture. Table 6 summarizes the distribution of the four dimensions and their main indicators based on the analysis of 47 articles.

Table 6. Distribution Of Four Dimensions Of Communication Education For Critical Citizenship

Dimension	Articles	Percentage	Main Indicators
Critical Media Literacy	21	44.7%	Critical analysis, verification, and algorithmic awareness
Dialogic Pedagogy	15	31.9%	Authentic dialogue, reflection, and teacher-student relation

Deliberative Digital Participation	17	36.2%	Online engagement, deliberation, civic action
Resistance to Dominant Discourses	12	25.5%	Critical resistance, counter-narrative, transformative action

Source: Processed from SLR results (2025). Note: total percentage exceeds 100% because one article may discuss more than one dimension.

The findings indicate that the four dimensions are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. Nineteen articles (40.4%) discuss at least three dimensions simultaneously, indicating patterns of theoretical convergence supporting the integrative hypothesis of this study.

Discussion

The findings of four dimensions of communication education for critical citizenship answer the problem formulation of how classrooms can transform into critical public spaces. These results directly confirm the research hypothesis that integrating pedagogical dimensions produces stronger critical citizenship than partial approaches. The following discussion interprets findings within relevant theoretical frameworks and connects them to current literature. First, the finding on critical media literacy as a foundation confirms Habermas's (2022) argument in *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that digital citizens require adequate communicative competencies to participate as authors in the networked public sphere. However, this finding also extends Habermas's thesis: critical media literacy is not merely a technical skill as argued by Lafont (2023), but also a political-economic understanding of platforms as emphasized by Emejulu and McGregor (2019). This represents an important modification to classical public sphere theory that has not fully accommodated the logic of platform capitalism.

Second, the dialogic pedagogy dimension reinforces the contemporary relevance of Freirean pedagogy in communication education. Jerome and Kisby's (2024) finding that teacher-student relationships are more influential than peer relationships indicates that communication educators function as dialogue facilitators, bridging theoretical knowledge with civic reality. This aligns with Cohen and Gilead's (2022) findings on the importance of complexity theory in teacher education for democratic citizenship, and Franch's (2020) positioning of Global Citizenship Education as a 21st-century moral pedagogy. Third, deliberative digital participation addresses Sander's (2025) critique that the current Habermasian approach is too pessimistic about social media. The findings show that with appropriate pedagogical interventions, digital participation can remain deliberative. This corrects the defeatist narrative in the literature and opens space for what Dommett and Verovšek (2021) call a "reflectively mediated digital public sphere." Fajri, Budimansyah, and Komalasari's (2022) study in the Indonesian context strengthens the argument that civic education based on digital citizenship can encourage youth political participation.

Fourth, the dimension of resistance to dominant discourses makes the most significant theoretical contribution. This finding confirms that communication education should not be reduced to "safe and responsible technology use" as critiqued by Estellés and Doherty (2025) and Heath (2018). Instead, communication education must become a critical praxis enabling students to challenge discursive hegemony, as articulated in Giroux's critical pedagogy tradition and further developed by Moyo (2020) in the Global South context.

The integrative interpretation of the four dimensions yields a theoretical framework called the Critical Communication Citizenship Framework (CCCF). This framework is a modification of Ribble's (2015) classical digital citizenship model, which has been criticized for its emphasis on

personal responsibility. CCCF places four dimensions, critical literacy, dialogue, deliberation, and resistance, as mutually supporting pillars, with the classroom as the starting site and public space as the actualization field. This framework is consistent with Westheimer and Kahne's typology, distinguishing the justice-oriented citizen from other variants.

Compared to Santamaría-Cárdaba et al. (2024), who conclude that Global Citizenship Education still fails to shape critically transformative citizens in higher education, this finding provides conditional optimism: transformation is possible when the four dimensions are consciously integrated. This also expands Goren and Yemini's findings regarding GCE redefinition by adding a specific communication dimension. However, several tensions must be acknowledged. Thornberg's (2010) study, as cited in Jerome and Kisby (2024), reminds us that democratic forums in schools can become ritualistic and performative. This means CCCF implementation requires institutional commitment that transcends curriculum formalism. These findings also face Lafont's (2023) challenge that political fragmentation cannot be fully resolved by media literacy; broader platform regulation and structural reform are required. In the Indonesian context, these findings have significant implications for praxis. Communication education in higher education needs to be reconstructed from a technical-professional orientation toward critical-transformative praxis. Curricula need to integrate critical media literacy, dialogic teaching methods, community-based digital participation projects, and critical analysis of political discourse. This reconstruction aligns with the Merdeka Belajar spirit while addressing Indonesia's challenges in digital democracy.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the synthesis of three traditions that have run parallel: Habermasian public sphere theory, Freirean critical pedagogy, and digital citizenship approaches. CCCF offers an integrative framework that can serve as a reference for further research in communication education, particularly in the Global South context, which has been underrepresented in reputable literature. Its practical contribution is a roadmap for reconstructing communication education curricula in Indonesia to be more responsive to the demands of 21st-century critical citizenship.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that communication education has transformative capacity to shape critical citizenship when integrating four dimensions: critical media literacy, dialogic pedagogy, deliberative digital participation, and resistance to dominant discourses. Transformation from classroom to public space does not occur automatically but requires conscious pedagogical design and an integrative theoretical framework. The Critical Communication Citizenship Framework (CCCF) proposed in this article is a synthesis of public sphere theory, critical pedagogy, and digital citizenship relevant to contemporary deliberative democracy, particularly in Indonesia and the Global South. The limitation of this research lies in its coverage of articles from English-language publications, so further research is needed to expand the study of local Southeast Asian literature. Practical recommendations include reconstructing communication education curricula, training lecturers in dialogic pedagogy, and developing digital community-based projects as laboratories of critical citizenship. Future research directions should include empirical testing of CCCF in Indonesian higher education settings and cross-cultural comparative studies with other Global South contexts.

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