

Political Education in Action: Social Studies Majors' Insights on Building Quality Education and Just Institutions

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Abstract. This research discussed the political consciousness and civic involvement of students pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education in Social Studies at Bulacan State University and how they will use their role as future teachers to educate an enlightened citizenry. There was a high level of political consciousness found in the respondents, but only a moderate level of civic participation. This gap emphasizes the essential demand for pedagogical approaches that enable students to turn knowledge into action. Dramatic contrasts across year levels highlight the imperatives of a developmental strategy for civic education, sharpening more and more awareness and engagement in politics and society. Knowledge, while a necessary foundation, is prioritized by this study as not enough on its own to bring about effective civic participation. The future teachers learn optimally if they are given genuine opportunities to interact with the life of society, think critically about their experiences, and think actively about how they can make meaningful contributions to nation-building. To satisfy this need, the Social Studies program must put theory into practice—encouraging not just intellectual development, but ethical and emotional growth as well. In this way, it prepares future teachers to be active, responsible, and transformative citizens. Lastly, this reaffirms the core function that education plays to build a more equitable and democratic society.

Keywords: Political education; Social studies majors; Sustainable development goals; Quality education; Just institutions

1.0 Introduction

Political education plays a crucial role in shaping citizens into informed, engaged, and accountable adults, especially in an era where democratic societies face increasingly complex social and political challenges. Recent international and local research underscores that robust political education significantly enhances students' civic knowledge, motivation, and sense of efficacy—cornerstones for effective democratic engagement (Schulz et al., 2018; Hoskins et al., 2021; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2020; Lozano et al., 2020). The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016, for example, found that students systematically taught about civic matters are more likely to vote, participate in public debate, and engage in civic activities, directly contributing to the aims of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions (Schulz et al., 2018; Martin, 2023).

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has emphasized the integration of peace and global citizenship education into the K to 12 curriculum to promote values such as inclusivity, equity, and responsible global engagement (Department of Education, 2018; Department of Education, 2022). Recent studies in the Philippines confirm that deeper exposure to political education within Social Studies curricula leads to

higher levels of political awareness and civic engagement among students (Cantiga et al., 2025). Furthermore, research indicates that social networking sites play a significant role in shaping the political participation of Filipino youth, particularly through their influence on political awareness and efficacy (Obenza & Rabaca, 2024). These students are more likely to participate in voting, community extension, and policy debates, reflecting the real-world impact of quality political teaching and other participatory influences.

Globally, research continues to demonstrate that political education not only boosts civic participation but also supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. For instance, ActionAid (2022) highlights how political education empowers learners to claim their rights, fulfill their responsibilities, and meaningfully engage in public life. Similarly, Pfister et al. (2022) show that students exposed to well-structured civic learning environments report greater civic efficacy and heightened willingness to participate in democratic processes. Adding a regional perspective, Chung & Fung (2024) find that civic and moral education infused with multicultural values enhances political self-efficacy and trust in democratic systems among Taiwanese youth. While the Department of Education continues to promote SDG-aligned reforms in basic education (Department of Education, 2022), there remains a research gap regarding how political education in higher education—particularly among Social Studies majors—contributes to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Philippine setting, additional studies are needed to explore how Social Studies majors perceive their roles in promoting quality education and building peaceful, inclusive societies (United Nations, 2023).

This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing the beliefs and experiences of Social Studies majors at Bulacan State University regarding political education and its relationship to the fulfillment of SDG 4 and SDG 16. By examining their political awareness, civic literacy, and understanding of democratic principles, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how political education can drive both educational quality and democratic sustainability in the local context.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design, allowing the researchers to examine and compare the levels of political awareness, civic engagement, and attitudes toward political education across different academic levels of Social Studies majors. This method is ideal for identifying patterns and analyzing differences in perceptions among subgroups without manipulating variables. It also aligns with the study's objective of exploring how such factors influence the realization of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in Social Studies at Bulacan State University, covering all year levels from first to fourth year. The total population consisted of 184 students, from which 134 responded to the survey, resulting in a 72.83% response rate—considered sufficient for academic research (Fincham, 2008; Babbie, 2016). A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only those relevant to the study's objectives were included. The inclusion criteria required that participants be officially enrolled as Social Studies majors during the academic year and actively attending classes from the first to the fourth year. Students who were not enrolled in the Social Studies program, were on leave of absence during the data collection period, or submitted incomplete or invalid survey responses were excluded from the study. These criteria were set to guarantee that the data collected reflected accurate and relevant insights aligned with the research objectives.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary tool for data collection was a structured survey questionnaire administered online through Google Forms. The instrument was developed through a careful review of relevant literature and was guided by the study's theoretical frameworks—Civic Republicanism (Pettit, 1997; Sandel, 1996) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). It was designed to quantitatively measure students' levels of political awareness, civic engagement, and attitudes toward political education about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Items were formulated to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and conceptual foundations, with attention to clarity, coherence, and content relevance. The use of an online format allowed for wider reach, respondent anonymity, and increased convenience in participation (Dillman et al., 2014; Evans & Mathur, 2005).

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms. A link to the survey was distributed through institutional email and student group chats. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the estimated time for completion, and the assurance of confidentiality. Responses were collected over two weeks. The online format facilitated easier access and allowed respondents to participate at their convenience, which is ideal for student populations with varying schedules.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean, frequency, and percentage distributions of political awareness, civic engagement, and political education attitudes. To assess whether significant differences existed across year levels, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed (Pallant, 2020; Field, 2018). This statistical test is appropriate for comparing means among more than two independent groups.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study observed standard ethical protocols throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to survey completion. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, with no personally identifiable information collected. All data were used solely for academic and research purposes. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human participants, as practiced within the institution.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Results

The distribution of participants across year levels was relatively even. Third-year students comprised the largest group ($n = 36$, 26.9%), followed by second-year ($n = 35$, 26.1%) and first-year students ($n = 34$, 25.4%). Fourth-year students represented the smallest group ($n = 29$, 21.6%). This fairly balanced representation across cohorts supports meaningful year-level comparisons and strengthens the overall reliability of the findings.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Year Level	Frequency	Percent
1st	34	25.4
2nd	35	26.1
3rd	36	26.9
4th	29	21.6
Total	134	100.0

Social Studies majors demonstrate a very high level of political awareness. This supports findings by Landig and Landig (2024) and Arugay and Mendoza (2024), which emphasize the influence of civic education and digital platforms—particularly social media—on shaping Filipino youth's political awareness. The results are aligned with Civic Republicanism's emphasis on active citizenship (Barber, 1984; Sandel, 1996) and Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, particularly on the role of modeled behavior and media exposure in civic learning. These insights directly support SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Table 2. Level of Political Awareness among Social Studies Majors

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
S2_1	4.54	0.82	Very High
S2_2	4.28	0.86	Very High
S2_3	4.20	0.92	Very High
S2_4	4.46	0.81	Very High
S2_5	4.18	0.81	High
Average	4.33	0.84	Very High

The average rating indicates that Social Studies majors exhibit high levels of civic and political engagement, particularly in informal or grassroots contexts (e.g., community involvement, voting). However, moderate participation is seen in more formal structures. This supports the advocacy for civic-centered education spaces (Philippine Journal of Education Studies, 2024) and aligns with Bandura's (1986) view that a supportive social environment nurtures civic efficacy. Educational environments have a substantial influence on youth political involvement (Schulz et al., 2018), aligning with the participatory goals of SDG 16.

Table 3. Civic and Political Engagement of Social Studies Majors

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
S3_1	3.18	1.10	Moderate
S3_2	4.50	1.19	Very High
S3_3	3.57	1.16	Very High
S3_4	3.40	1.27	High
S3_5	4.24	0.93	Very High
Average	3.78	1.13	High

Respondents firmly believe in the transformative role of political education in advancing SDG 4 and SDG 16. These perceptions reflect ongoing efforts by DepEd (2022) and align with global frameworks advocating for education as a pathway to peace, justice, and institutional development (United Nations, 2023). These results also align with Paulo Freire’s (1970) Critical Pedagogy and Andreotti’s (2011) model of global citizenship education, which emphasize awareness, reflection, and action for social change.

Table 4. Perceptions of Political Education about SDG 4 and SDG 16

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
S4_1	4.81	0.58	Very High
S4_2	4.79	0.60	Very High
S4_3	4.78	0.56	Very High
S4_4	4.86	0.56	Very High
S4_5	4.81	0.56	Very High
Average	4.81	0.56	Very High

Social Studies majors express strong confidence in their role as future educators and democratic actors. This belief supports Bandura’s (1986) concept of self-efficacy and is affirmed by Pfister et al. (2022), who argue that structured civic education increases students’ perceived agency. These findings also echo UNESCO’s (2020) claim that educators are central to achieving peace and justice, the pillars of SDG 16.

Table 5. Beliefs on the Role of Social Studies Majors in Building Strong Institutions

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
S6_1	4.64	0.73	Strongly Agree
S6_2	4.69	0.69	Strongly Agree
S6_3	4.69	0.69	Strongly Agree
S6_4	4.47	0.83	Strongly Agree
S6_5	4.57	0.74	Strongly Agree
Average	4.61	0.73	Strongly Agree

3.2 Inferential Results

The ANOVA results show that while most items did not reveal statistically significant differences across year levels, items S5_2 and S5_3 indicate significant variation in political awareness and engagement, suggesting developmental differences as students progress. These findings are consistent with Saat et al. (2025), who emphasize that sustained civic education across educational stages enhances political participation. UNESCO (2020) similarly underscores inclusive and continuous political education as key to achieving SDGs 4 and 16.

Table 6. Difference in Political Awareness and Civic Engagement Across Year Levels

Item	F-value	P-value	Significant?	Interpretation
S5_1	1.620	.188	No	No significant difference in political awareness/engagement across year levels.
S5_2	9.032	.000	Yes	Significant differences exist between year levels for this item – political awareness/engagement varies by year.
S5_3	5.443	.001	Yes	Significant differences exist between year levels for this item as well.
S5_4	0.097	.962	No	No significant difference; year level does not affect responses on this item.
S5_5	1.613	.189	No	No significant difference between year levels for this item.

4.0 Conclusion

This study examined the political consciousness and civic engagement of Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in Social Studies at Bulacan State University. While the results revealed an impressively high level of political awareness, students' actual civic participation was found to be relatively moderate. This gap suggests that while students understand political concepts and societal issues, they may lack the confidence, motivation, or institutional support to translate this awareness into sustained civic involvement.

To address this, the curriculum should be enhanced by embedding civic action components into courses—not just through theoretical discussions but by integrating service-learning, issue-based projects, or community immersion activities that allow students to engage directly with societal concerns. These experiences will strengthen students' connection between classroom learning and real-world participation. In terms of pedagogy, instructors should adopt critical, participatory, and experiential teaching strategies, such as deliberative dialogues, role-plays, simulations of democratic processes, and reflective journaling. These methods will help develop both the cognitive and affective dimensions of civic learning—deepening not only students' understanding but also their commitment to active citizenship. The observed differences in political engagement across year levels also suggest the need for a developmentally sequenced civic education framework. Courses and activities should be scaffolded to gradually increase in complexity and depth, ensuring that students' political efficacy and civic agency are nurtured throughout their academic journey.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to track changes in students' political beliefs and behaviors over time, particularly as they transition from pre-service to in-service teaching. It would also be valuable to explore the role of digital platforms in facilitating or hindering civic engagement among education students. Further comparative studies across different majors, institutions, or geographic contexts can also broaden our understanding of civic development in teacher education. Ultimately, this study affirms the transformative role of Social Studies education in shaping not only knowledgeable future teachers but also socially responsible and action-oriented citizens. Teacher education programs must rise to this challenge by creating learning environments that promote civic engagement as both a professional and personal commitment.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author 1: Conceptualization, Proposal Writing, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing

Author 2: Data Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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